



The
RED CROSS GIRLS
AFLOAT *with the* FLAG

MARGARET VANDERCOOK



"DON'T YOU THINK MY LITTLE CRAFT WOULD CARRY
THE TWO OF US?"

The Red Cross Girls Afloat With the Flag

By

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THE RED CROSS GIRLS AFLOAT WITH THE FLAG

CHAPTER I

A Brilliant Afternoon

ONE afternoon late in May there was a sudden burst of music along Fifth Avenue.

It was the closing hour of a great Red Cross drive. In front of the Public Library at Forty-second Street a large crowd had gathered. When the music started the men took off their hats, the women stood on tiptoe.

A passageway between the crowds had been left open. This was directly in front and led up the central flight of steps toward the broad stone terrace before the library, where a small open-air Liberty theater had been erected for war purposes.

Turning in from the street at the head of the procession marched groups of women and girls carrying large United States flags firmly held by the four corners. Into these flags, already weighted with money, the cheering throngs of people now flung other donations, pennies, silver, bills of many denominations.

The sky was radiantly blue and the sun shone warm as a midsummer sun. There was a wonderful spirit abroad, such a combination of courage and generosity, it was transformed into an atmosphere of gaiety, as if the contributors to the Red Cross fund, intended for the healing of the allied nations, were able for today, at least, to look beyond the sorrow and suffering of war to victory and freedom.

Among the flag bearers was a tall, striking-looking woman with dark blue eyes and a vivid color, who walked with a peculiar grace and distinction, apparently attracting the notice of a number of onlookers. Immediately following her was a young girl about seventeen years old.

She had fair hair, a slender pointed chin, large dark eyes and delicate features.

Instead of asking for contributions as her companions were doing, she appeared embarrassed and frightened by the conspicuousness of her position and kept her eyes lowered. She had neither the look nor the manner of an American girl, yet although the difference was there it would have been difficult to define. When she did raise her eyes it was to glance with admiration, almost with appeal, toward the figure of the woman marching in advance of her.

Opposite the younger girl, who was half Italian, half American, was another girl a number of years older. Mildred Thornton had a grave, almost a sad expression, yet at this moment she was so absorbed in the enthusiasm of her cause that she seemed to have forgotten herself.

As the four figures, bearing the United States flag, turned from the street to step up upon the sidewalk, impulsively she unfastened a heavy gold chain from her throat, dropping it into the flag already weighted with other Red Cross offerings.

Unaware that anyone had observed her

action, hearing an unexpected "Bravo," Mildred Thornton flushed uncomfortably, greatly disliking to have attracted the attention of the crowd.

The instant her clear gray eyes were turned toward his, the young American officer who had uttered the exclamation appreciated this fact.

Instead of speaking of what she had done to his companion, as he had intended, he courteously removed his hat as a tribute to the girl and to her deed.

Understanding that her mute entreaty for silence had been respected, the face and figure of the officer made an impression upon Mildred which she did not soon forget, although she had seen during the course of the long and stirring day many officers of the allied armies.

Preceding Mildred Thornton and holding the fourth corner of the same flag, was a girl with brown eyes, whose curling brown hair showed beneath the band of her Red Cross cap. Her manner was neither embarrassed nor self-conscious. From the early hours of the morning Barbara Thornton

had been inviting contributions to the Red Cross fund, sometimes by pleading with indifferent passers-by, at other times with gay little challenges. Yet in spite of her youthful and piquant air Barbara could not justly be called a girl, as she had been married to Richard Thornton for several years.

Following just behind the groups of girls and women who were carrying the flags, marched a division of New York City police as their bodyguard.

When they had mounted the steps they formed a semicircle in front of the library building, facing the crowded street. The women in their Red Cross uniforms with the blue uniformed police behind them formed an unforgettable tableau.

During the time the money was being collected and counted a band played "America." Now and then some one in the crowd applauded, but the greater number listened and watched in silence, filled with an emotion too deep for expression.

At length the money was safely gathered

in, but while it was being counted, a young man came and stood in the center of a small open-air theater.

This little Liberty theater, built on the esplanade before the library, had been one of the most interesting places in the United States for many months. From its tiny stage the most famous orators had spoken for war purposes. Here distinguished actors and actresses had appeared pleading the self-same cause and here the most celebrated singers had sung without price.

As the young artist looked toward the crowd they became silent and eager. To some of them he was unknown, to others his sudden rise to fame within the past few months was a story but lately told.

Yet they were interested and curious. There was something extraordinarily charming in his youth and grace, in his tall, slight figure and dark eyes.

He seemed to hesitate for a moment as if he were unaccustomed to an outdoor audience. Thus in the pause his eyes sought the face of a woman standing not

far away and surrounded by the three younger girls with whom she had carried the flag in the Red Cross procession.

Smiling and nodding, the artist turned again toward the waiting audience.

Then to the accompaniment of a piano he began singing the "Battle Hymn of the Republic."

"Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of
the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of
wrath were stored,
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible
swift sword,
His truth is marching on."

Away over the heads of the crowds soared the beautiful tenor voice, awaking their imaginations, stirring their hearts.

Above in the clear air half a dozen aeroplanes were making slow, circling flights; in the wide street the noisy traffic had halted for an instant.

"Glory, Glory, Hallelujah!
Glory, Glory, Hallelujah!
Glory, Glory, Hallelujah!
His truth is marching on."

As the song ended there were men and women present who had a vision of a final glorious end of war.

The moment the applause burst forth the singer vanished.

After a little, finding that he would not return and that the afternoon's program was concluded, the crowd began to disperse.

Two women began a discussion of the young artist.

"Do you say you have never heard of the singer, Carlo Navara? He is an American of Italian parents. Some time ago, before our country entered the war, he was wounded fighting for Italy and after his injury it was thought that he would never sing again. Then his voice came back in a surprising fashion and this winter he made his *début* at the Metropolitan. He had a tremendous success and I believe is said to be the great tenor of the future."

On the same evening, toward nine o'clock, a group of five persons were seated before the open windows of a living room in an apartment on Riverside Drive.

There remained an after-glow of color

on the river, of silver, lavender and rose. Riding at anchor about two hundred yards away was a gray battleship; up and down the river other boats were anchored, many of them bearing foreign flags. A gunboat was cruising quietly along and not far behind a river excursion steamer. Now and then, flashing over the scene, a giant searchlight made long bars of light.

"You never sang better than this afternoon, Carlo. I was proud of you. What an inspiration and comfort your voice will be to many thousands of people in these tragic times."

The woman, who was the hostess of the little company, spoke in a tone of affection and pride. In response the young man to whom she had spoken shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Thank you, Sonya. Yet perhaps I am not as grateful as I should be, although there was a time when I would gladly have exchanged a soldier's life for a singer's. In the days when I was fighting in Italy, because I believed it my duty, I gave far too much thought to my voice and to the

career I might be obliged to forego. Now when I am able to sing I think only of the soldiers in the trenches or at sea. Funny how contradictory we human beings are! Yet if I had the choice I should have preferred to fight for the United States, which is the country of my adoption, rather than for Italy. I would I could fight for both, but I suppose the doctors know best."

The young girl, Bianca, who was sitting beside him, shook her head disapprovingly.

"Why do you quarrel with fate, Carlo? Already you seem to me a much spoiled person! What will you be when you are older and become very famous? Italy is your country, also, and how does it matter since we are Allies?"

Carlo Navara, who in point of fact frequently behaved like a spoiled boy, answered irritably:

"Don't talk of what you understand nothing, Bianca Zoli. Patriotism is probably the last of your virtues. Yet I did see you bravely upholding the flag along Fifth Avenue this afternoon. I presume that was Sonya's suggestion."

"You forget, my father was an American, even if my mother gives you cause for doubting my patriotism," the younger girl returned, so gently that Carlo crimsoned with embarrassment and regret for his hasty speech.

Sonya Valesky shook her head reprov-
ingly.

"Please do not tease Bianca, Carlo. I see no reason for doubting her loyalty either to the United States or to Italy. I asked you to dinner tonight because I wished to tell you something which will not be a surprise to all of you, perhaps only to you and Bianca."

The woman who was speaking was Sonya Valesky, whom the Red Cross girls had met during their first crossing to Europe at the outbreak of the great war. Later, under more unusual circumstances, they had again come into contact with her in Russia. After her exile from Russia by the Czar she had accompanied them home to the United States, and, except for a season spent in a villa near Florence when the Red Cross girls were nursing in the American

hospital in Florence, she had lived quietly in New York with the young girl, Bianca Zoli, who had been confided to her charge under peculiar circumstances in Italy.

At the close of her speech, four faces were turned toward hers.

"As I share both in Sonya's secret and in her plan, I cannot pretend to be surprised," Mildred Thornton remarked.

Barbara Thornton, curled up in the largest chair in the room according to her usual custom, uttered an exclamation which was a combination of envy and regret.

"I have been given my sister-in-law's confidence, although Sonya has told me nothing. But as I am not to be allowed to take part in what they intend doing I altogether withhold my approval."

"Is there any especial reason why Bianca and I alone should have been kept in the dark, Sonya?" Carlo protested with an air of uneasiness and of offended dignity.

Since the days in Italy when Sonya Valesky had nursed him back to health at her lovely Italian villa and renewed his desire to live after he believed he would

never sing again, the young artist had constituted himself her especial knight and champion. He would have preferred a more romantic attitude, but this Sonya would not allow, insisting that the difference in their ages made even the suggestion ridiculous.

"No, I simply have not wanted to worry you and Bianca with the prospect of our separation until it became necessary. Then, Carlo, you have been so busy, first with your *début* and the concerts since. Everybody agrees these days that you have a great future before you. You will be leaving soon on your tour. I am expecting to sail early in June on the first American hospital ship. Mildred, as she has just told you, is to sail with me and we expect to have Nona Davis join us in France and return on the ship to help care for the wounded. Barbara, like a good little mother, is to remain at her home and see after her baby. Then, of course, she will devote herself to the war duties here, which, alas, are only just beginning! Barbara will chaperon you, Bianca. You have

promised me to spend another year at school."

"I presume you have elected to nurse on a hospital ship because you realize it is the most dangerous of all Red Cross work for women," Carlo remonstrated.

"Nonsense, the work aboard a hospital ship is no more dangerous than any other! It should be less so except that the Germans have utterly failed to respect the Red Cross Flag."

Sonya smiled.

"I have been studying with the hope of nursing on a hospital ship, although of course I should have answered any other call. I have always been ashamed of my lack of training as a nurse since the outbreak of the war, but more especially after watching the work of my friends, the four Red Cross girls, Eugenia, Mildred, Nona and Barbara. Eugenia has gone back to her hospital in France. But, by the way, two other girls are to be with us aboard ship, who, with Nona and Mildred, will form another group of four Red Cross girls. One of them is charming, Janet Perry.

I met her a number of times during the past winter; the other is a cousin of hers, who lives in the country and whom I do not yet know. I wish they could both have dined with us tonight. But don't look so depressed, Bianca, you and Signor Carlo Navara, I wish you to take my news more cheerfully."

"I detest being called 'Signor,' as if I were an Italian," Carlo returned.

Then when the group of girls had laughed at him, he added more seriously:

"I presume, Sonya, there is nothing that will persuade you to alter your decision?"

Sonya shook her head.

"No, not unless I should prove to have had insufficient training and fail as a nurse. I have been naturalized in order to undertake the Red Cross nursing. You know how urgent the demand for more nurses is at the present time, so that scarcely a day passes without a plea for help."

After Sonya's emphatic speech but little discussion or argument followed. Shortly after ten o'clock, Richard Thornton, who was on a short leave of absence from his

ambulance work in France, called to escort his wife and sister home.

A little later, Carlo Navara said good-night. If he were still opposed to Sonya's intention, he preferred reopening the subject with her alone.

Bianca made no comment until, when the older woman rose to go to her room, she suggested:

"If you are not sleepy, Sonya, suppose we walk up and down the Drive for a little while. There is something I also wish to tell you."

After strolling only a few blocks the woman and girl took their seats on a wooden bench facing the river.

"Perhaps I should have told you before, Sonya, but I have known for some time of the plan you just revealed to us. I overheard you speaking of it one day to Mildred Thornton, quite by accident. Later, I tried to discover as much as possible. I have made my own arrangements to sail on the same ship with you as a nurse's assistant. I have been studying the duties of a Red Cross helper for some time. Do

you suppose I can bear to be left alone, thinking always of what fate has befallen my unhappy mother after her treachery? I wonder if I will ever hear whether she is alive or dead. Sometimes I think no one understands me."

From first to last Bianca's speech was so unexpected that for a few seconds her companion did not reply. Bianca had taken the name of her foster mother and brothers, and from the hour of sailing from Italy,* had never mentioned her mother's name. Naturally Sonya believed she had chosen deliberately to ignore her existence and there were reasons why it was wiser to allow this to be true.

Sonya shook her head.

"You were not straightforward, Bianca, and it is the one thing I have insisted upon. I thought you told me you intended conquering your former secretiveness. As for your idea of helping with the work on board the hospital ship, please dismiss the subject altogether; you are too young and I believe too incompetent. Your arrangements must be altered."

*See "The Red Cross Girls with the Italian Army."

Sonya ceased speaking, observing that a strange man was approaching.

As he drew near he stopped and spoke to them in Russian.

Sonya slipped her arm quickly through her companion's.

"Let us go back at once, Bianca. I do not wish to be annoyed, I am through with the Russian problem forever. Now I have become an American citizen, all my allegiance and affection belong to the United States."

She spoke in a sufficiently loud tone for her words to be overheard.

The Russian made no effort to follow Sonya or to protest against her decision; however, he kept his eyes fastened upon the woman and girl until they were out of sight.

CHAPTER II

The New Red Cross Girls

A FEW days later, in the first week of June, a girl was sitting out of doors in the yard of an old-fashioned farmhouse. In spite of the fact that she was resting after a fatiguing day, her hands were moving swiftly and skillfully folding and arranging a number of gauze bandages.

Her dark hair, parted in the center, was drawn plainly down half-way over her ears in stiff, puritanical fashion. She had grave, dark-brown eyes, a brilliant color and a mouth which represented a strange contradiction, for in spite of the full arch and the redness of her lips, the expression was severe and unsympathetic. Without knowing a great deal of the world, the face suggested that its owner had set up certain fixed standards of conduct and expected other people to conform to her ideas.

At present she was alone. Another girl might have been frightened by the isolation of her surroundings, but the little farm was Louise Roberts' home and she would not have understood any reason for nervousness.

It was a charming old place in spite of its poverty and simplicity. Twin maple trees with their branches embracing one another stood in front of the gray-shingled house, with an old well at one side.

Hearing a voice calling her from some distance, Louise scarcely glanced up. Smoothing her Red Cross apron into straight folds, she shouted a little returning "Hello" in response.

A few moments after, a young man stepped over the hedge and without waiting to be invited sat down beside her.

"You have no regrets and no fears, now that the time for leaving home is so near at hand, Ouida?" he demanded, in a tone which had in it a slight suggestion of wistfulness.

The girl shook her head.

"How can I have regrets, when I am at last to do what I have been working for

these past three years? I suppose I might have gone into Red Cross nursing earlier, other people do, but I wanted to be sure I understood my business. Janet Perry and I will make an odd combination of trained nurses, won't we, as if we represented an ant and a butterfly? We have decided that if I bore the wounded soldiers too seriously after they become convalescent, Janet is to take them off my hands for proper amusement. In spite of her good intentions it is difficult to imagine Janet looking after the men who are desperately ill, but she is pretty sure never to bore any one of them. You know I am expecting Janet to arrive at any moment. She is to spend the next few days before we sail here at the farm with me; she wrote me she dreaded having to say farewell to her family and friends at the last moment. Perhaps it is just as well I have no family and so few friends who will really miss me.

"As for being afraid, I can only think of what a wonderful chance it is to receive an appointment to nurse on the first real American hospital ship to sail from the

United States to France in the present war! You know the *Consolation* is to make the attempt to sail unconvoyed as another test of Germany's attitude toward the Red Cross flag. We plan to sail directly to the American naval base abroad, receive the wounded and start immediately for home. Forgive my talking about myself, but I am so full of the few details of our work which we have just been told. You see, I received a letter with my instructions this morning and have been alone ever since."

As she talked, Louise ("Ouida") Roberts' face expressed intense interest and enthusiasm. No one could doubt her devotion to the labor ahead of her in spite of its peril and strangeness. About two months before she had completed her training as a nurse in a prominent New York City hospital, but this was to be her first outside experience.

At the beginning of her long speech the girl scarcely noticed the unaccustomed silence of her companion, then catching an unusual look in his eyes, she added half carelessly, half kindly:

"It is hard upon you, John, isn't it, to be compelled on account of your health to remain at home when every other young man is either in camp or actually fighting? But then you can console yourself with the idea that farming is really war work and after all you never have greatly cared for adventure. You are a dreamer, not a fighter; when we were children I used to lead you into most of our difficulties."

Unconsciously the girl's tone was both patronizing and superior. But when the young fellow beside her uttered an exclamation neither very polite nor complimentary she frowned upon him as if he alone were guilty of offence.

Louise Roberts, who was frequently called "Ouida," and John Mallory had been neighbors and childhood friends. When they were not friends they had been companions, for there were moments, like the present one, when they disagreed almost to the point of disliking each other.

From the time they were children John Mallory had been forced to realize that Louise was physically the stronger and less sensitive and fearful.

In announcing that she had led the way in most of their adventures she had spoken the truth, yet for this reason John felt that she might have spared him her present reference to the fact which had always made him uncomfortable. For as long as he could remember he had hated the sight of pain and suffering in animals and people and had a nervous dread of it for himself. It was often a secret fear with him that he was at heart a coward. Louise had never appeared afraid of anything in her life, nor did suffering seem to make a great deal of impression upon her, although she did whatever practical thing she knew how to do to relieve it. But John could never quite forgive her lack of sensibility.

The little farm had been left to Louise by the aunt with whom she had lived as a child. During the years of her hospital training, on her occasional visits to her home, Louise had often related stories in connection with her hospital work which had shocked and repelled John Mallory. Louise was entirely unconscious of this, although sometimes aware that John found her unattractive.

John Mallory had not allowed his weakness to prevent his offering himself as a volunteer as soon as the United States entered the war. He actually had tried to enter three or four different branches of the service, but in every case had been refused on account of his health. After the draft he had appeared before another examining board, only to be refused once again.

"The fates at your birthday party, Ouida, gave you many gifts, but they seem to have left out the gift of tact. Why should you speak of the one thing that hurts me most? I would give my life gladly for the chance other men have. Suppose we talk now of something else" he said bluntly.

John Mallory was a tall, slender fellow between twenty-one and two and a year younger than Louise. There was an expression of boyish dreaming in his wide-open blue eyes, and his fair hair had been burned by the sun until it was almost red. Two years he had been a student of agriculture at Cornell University and was now spending as much time out of doors as

possible to counteract his natural delicacy. About him there was an air of intellectual refinement, a gentleness which was oddly charming.

He put out his hand now.

"Forgive me, Louise. How like us to have come near quarreling just when I wished to be most agreeable and to say farewell to you! I can't pretend to be content with my fate of making two blades of wheat grow where one has grown before, nevertheless I intend to do my best and certainly not to complain. I am glad you wish me to look after your little farm while you are away, it will be a happy memory of you."

To John's surprise the girl made no answer to his speech. Under the circumstances he was sorry that Louise should remain angry. True she had never been so quick to make friends after a difficulty as he had always been, yet this afternoon the circumstances were unusual.

Then he discovered that Louise did not reply because her lips were trembling and she was having difficulty in holding back

her tears. Only once or twice in her life had John seen her display so much emotion.

There were many persons who considered Louise Roberts strikingly handsome. Her face was a pure oval, her skin olive with beautiful vivid rose in her cheeks. It was the expression which was not always pleasing.

But now her face had softened wonderfully.

"I'm sorry, John, if I have hurt you. No, I am not tactful. Do you suppose I will ever learn to be? But don't believe I mean to be unkind; it is mere stupidity."

Then before John Mallory was able to make a reply, there was a sound of a motor being driven swiftly along the country lane. The next instant a flash of blue appeared at the front gate and a girl, jumping quickly out of the car, came forward with her hands outstretched.

She wore a costume of French blue, the color of her automobile; her eyes under her close-fitting blue hat were almost the same color. She was small and graceful, although her features were perhaps too irregular

for beauty. She had a little, upward tilted nose, a square chin, a large mouth with a short upper lip and radiant, flashing white teeth.

"Have I interrupted a tête-à-tête? Well, I am sorry and glad too, since it gives me an opportunity of speaking to you, Mr. Mallory."

She had a gracious, friendly manner difficult to resist.

"Sorry to see me, Ouida?" she demanded, kissing the older girl on both cheeks in a foreign fashion of which Louise disapproved. Janet Perry had spent several years in a French boarding school and felt she had the right to preserve certain foreign customs which she considered pleasing.

The two girls were distant cousins. Occasionally, when a small child, Janet had spent her summer holidays with a great aunt of her father's who owned a little farm in New Jersey not a great many miles from New York City.

Janet had an odd fancy for the place and also for the young girl cousin who lived there with the old maid aunt. To Janet, Louise was very beautiful.

The one girl was like a little wayward flame. The other seemed to have neither warmth nor waywardness; once determined upon a course she was not inclined to change.

After the two girls were grown they had seen each other infrequently, yet never did the old attraction entirely pass away. Louise Roberts spent two years at college, coming back to the farm until her aunt's death and later living there for a little time alone.

Janet Perry became one of the most popular girls in Philadelphia society, for if she were not beautiful there were few men who realized the fact, so great was her vivacity and sweetness.

A year after the outbreak of the war the two cousins had met again under unexpected circumstances.

It was not surprising that Louise Roberts should study to be a trained nurse; there was a need for her to make her living and she had always been attracted by the profession. But for Janet to turn from the gaiety and success of her society life was perhaps more unusual.

"You will stay to dinner with us?" Louise asked John Mallory a little shyly, and coldly, perhaps because of her shyness.

But John Mallory declined. Immediately after, in spite of the fact that Janet insisted he should remain and help to entertain her, he started to leave.

"You will see that no one steals us tonight, won't you? It is a mistake to believe that because I am to attempt nursing aboard a hospital ship that I am not a coward" Janet protested. "You see why I intend to keep close beside Ouida, for if anything should happen to our ship she has promised to take care of me."

John Mallory laughed: "I understood there was some bond between us, Miss Perry. Now I know what it is. The fact is I also am a coward and Ouida has always been taking care of me. So you won't need my protection tonight. Good-bye, I shall hope to see you again before you sail."

CHAPTER III

One Braver Thing

“OUIDA, please don't go to sleep. I have something important to tell you.”

Louise Roberts turned over with a little half-suppressed sigh.

She was more tired than she had realized and for some odd reason unexpectedly depressed, when she had been especially exhilarated and happy all day. She had wished to go to sleep and forget the absurd regrets which troubled her. Hating sentimentality in any form, as she believed she did, it was foolish to be distressed over saying farewell to her little farm and to certain of her old friends. She had not considered that she cared a great deal for her home, except as a place for holidays, having always wished for a wider life in the world of action, and she had thought that the people in her old neighborhood bored

her, they were so devoted to petty gossip and their small affairs. Yet there were a few unlike the others and one was obliged to feel natural affection for one's past associations.

For a good many years Louise remembered having been invited to remain awake until midnight to listen to Janet's account of her latest romance, which usually had ended in disaster. Each time Janet believed she was intensely in earnest until her affairs reached a certain crisis. Already she had been engaged several times and each time had broken the engagement.

As a matter of fact, Louise had suspected that one of Janet's reasons for wishing to nurse aboard a hospital ship, rather than in her own country as her family desired, was because she hoped to escape an uncomfortable entanglement.

"All right. What is the present difficulty? You have not been breaking another engagement?" the older girl returned good naturedly, even if a trifle sleepily.

The two girls were occupying the same

room and the same big, old-fashioned mahogany four-posted bed. Louise's long dark hair was severely braided in two braids. Janet's lay spread out upon the pillow, a shimmer of light even in the semi-darkness. The window was open and the moonlight shone into the room.

Outside an apple tree grew just beneath their bedroom window, and although the spring blossoms had faded, the tree continued fragrant with the scent of wind-swept leaves and budding fruits.

"I don't know why you make such a suggestion, Ouida," Janet answered with reproach in her tones. "Yet as a matter of fact I have just broken my engagement to Howard Courtnay. I hope never to see him again, unless he marries or dies, or something happens to him," she ended a trifle incoherently.

"But I was under the impression, Janet, that the Rev. Howard Courtnay was your one satisfactory friend. You have always insisted there was nothing between you except friendship," Louise finally protested.

Janet hesitated.

"That was true until a few months ago, Louise, then Howard and I decided we had changed our minds. I presume he had once believed I was frivolous, and then, when I entered the Red Cross nursing, he considered I had altered."

"But haven't you, Janet?" Louise inquired.

"I don't know," the other girl answered with unexpected gravity. "Sometimes I believe that this war has changed us all. In these last few years we have been made over again. Then, sometimes I wonder if when the war ends, if it ever does, will we not return to our old selfishness! But I am unchanged in one way, Ouida; I can never make up my mind to marry a clergyman. I am not suited to the life in any possible way and I would only make Howard and myself equally unhappy."

Louise pondered this. If true, then why had Janet ever become engaged to her former friend? He had been rector in a small church in Philadelphia for the past two years, so that his profession was scarcely a mystery.

Nevertheless, Louise Roberts could not fail to agree with the latter part of the other girl's statement. Nothing could be more impossible than to conceive of Janet's performing the duties of a parish.

"Yet you must have known before what you had to expect," Louise expostulated, not with the idea that there was any particular point in making her remark. Whatever Janet did or left undone, she generally had a motive which she regarded as satisfactory.

"Please don't be so tiresome, Ouida. Don't you realize that you are saying just what every person would say who knew the circumstances. Of course very few people do know, and I would not mind so much, except that Howard said the same thing, and I did not enjoy hearing it from him. I did not think it very courteous. What is the use of discussing why human beings change their views? Howard also insisted that I would never make a success as a Red Cross nurse unless I had conquered my frivolity. He even insisted that a clergyman's wife need be no more serious

than a nurse. I do not agree with him in that. Besides I have only volunteered to nurse during the period of the war and not forever and ever, Amen. It is the foreverness which frightens one about marriage, isn't it? That is what I told Howard. But do you think I shall make a failure as a Red Cross nurse, Ouida? I have not confessed this to any one else, but recently I have worried for fear I should."

At this moment Janet sat up in bed, crossing her small hands under her chin and gazing intently at her companion. Yet in reality she was not regarding Louise, she was thinking so intently.

Partly from weariness, partly from another cause, Louise Roberts sighed.

"How do I know, Janet child, how well or how ill we may fulfill our responsibilities as Red Cross nurses? Certainly it seems to me that we have undertaken a difficult form of nursing. But perhaps the soldiers who will return on the hospital ships will not be so desperately ill as those remaining in the hospitals in France. In a way we volunteer nurses have to suffer the nervous-

ness and uncertainty of untried soldiers. How can we know until we meet the test whether we will bring honor or dishonor upon our uniforms? I am sure I also have been troubled, and I have no more reason to think I will be a success than you have."

In answer to this speech Janet slipped out of the tall bed down to the floor, which was carpeted with rag rug half a century old.

She looked like a little girl in her white gown with her hair loose over her shoulders.

"Nonsense, Louise, you know you are a wonder as a nurse. No one ever deserved greater praise than you from the hospital faculty at your graduation. I told Sonya Valesky that you would be sure to make up for my deficiencies."

Moving quickly toward the window, Janet leaned out, while from the bed the other girl watched her, half impatient and half admiring. It was true that each girl possessed what the other lacked.

"Aren't you ever going to sleep tonight, Janet?"

"No, for some reason or other, I cannot. These June nights in the country are so

lovely and there are to be so few of them for us for a time. Soon we will have only the sky and sea to look out upon. I don't think I am afraid now to stay alone, in another moment I will go into the next room and leave you in peace."

About to move from the window, the next instant Janet turned back, leaning out a second time.

The little farm was less than half a mile from the nearest village, a town of only a few hundred people.

To her surprise she had seen above the village a small bright cloud rising, then circling and spreading out with gray curling edges.

Before she could speak the quiet night was broken by the harsh jangling of bells.

A second later and Louise Roberts was leaning out beside her cousin.

A fire in the country is always strangely disquieting. The two girls slipped their arms about each other.

In a moment Janet Perry, who thought and moved more quickly than Louise, suggested:

“Hurry, Ouida, perhaps we may be useful. You can’t think of sleeping now, and in any case I mean to drive down to the village to see what is happening. I’ll have my motor out and we can reach there in five minutes.”

In scarcely more time the two girls had joined the crowd in the main street.

There were other motors beside their own which had speeded in from adjacent farms.

The sidewalks were crowded with men, women and children, moving like dark, disordered shadows, the men shouting, the women talking, the children crying.

Janet’s voice shook a little, she was too filled with warmth and human sympathy not to be deeply affected by excitement or suffering.

“What building is on fire, Ouida? I don’t understand? Have you discovered? Then why is the entire town so troubled?”

Janet had been obliged to slow up her car near the sidewalk. They had approached a rope which had been drawn across the road to prevent the crowd going too near

the scene of the fire. Beyond this rope the village volunteer fire department was at work.

Louise Roberts leaned over the side of the car. She spoke in a tone of such self control and calmness that it influenced the man to whom she addressed her question, as well as her companion.

"Don't worry too much, Janet," she explained an instant later. "It is only one of the village shops that is on fire. The worst of the trouble is that all our Red Cross supplies are stored there and the boxes have just been packed for shipping. We have worked so hard and no one understands how the fire started. I suppose that is why everybody seems so agitated."

As Janet brought her motor to a stop, she and Louise both stepped out. Then slipping her arm inside her cousin's, Louise drew her along until finally they had secured a position where they could look directly upon the burning building.

It was of wood and the entire lower floor appeared to be blazing, for every now and then little jets of flame shot out like mock-

ing tongues from the windows on the second floor.

"Well, it might be worse, you know," a man protested to his wife with rough kindness. He was standing in front of the two girls.

"It is a pity to lose all the good work and love you women have put into your Red Cross dressings and supplies. Yet it is a lucky thing this store has been vacant for the past few months. I wouldn't give much for any human being's chance of getting out of a fire like this alive."

Before the man's words had ended, Janet Perry, who was listening, while at the same time gazing toward the fire, gave a quickly suppressed cry.

The same instant her cry was echoed by a hundred throats.

At the central window of the building a figure had made its appearance, a figure so unexpected, so startling, it was as if it were not a reality, but a vision.

The figure was that of a little girl wearing the uniform of a Red Cross nurse. About her head was bound the white kerchief

with the cross of mercy, over her slender figure was the white gown with the insignia on the sleeve. Her arms were outstretched, as if she were about to fly down into the waiting arms of the onlookers.

Then some one recognized the child. Her name went up from a dozen throats.

Louise slipped her arm about Janet.

"The little girl has been working for many weeks for the Liberty Loan and thrift stamps. From the closing of school until dusk in her Red Cross costume she was up and down the streets of the village, untiring in her efforts," Louise whispered. "Tonight from some childish fancy she must have dressed herself in her uniform, and with an idea that she might be able to save the Red Cross supplies she must have slipped unnoticed inside the burning building."

There was no possible hope that she could be saved. Behind the child a part of the framework of the second floor at this moment gave way.

Janet closed her eyes; the little girl had begun to cry out and to plead for help.

Then she heard the crowd shout again, partly in remonstrance, partly with matchless enthusiasm. She felt Louise's arm slip away from its clasp on hers and opening her eyes saw that Louise was moving forward struggling to make her way through the throng.

Janet also saw that in the brief interval when she had not been watching a long ladder had been placed against the front of the store. Up this ladder the slender figure of a man was now moving rapidly and surely.

By the light from the fire it was easy to recognize John Mallory. His face was white and steadfast and in some curious fashion his hair appeared like an aureole of flames.

Janet moved forward and this time her arm supported her cousin.

There was no further sound, no movement from the waiting crowd.

Reaching the window ledge, John Mallory put his arm about the little girl. At this same instant the frame of the window where she had been standing gave way, and

against this same framework the ladder had rested.

For an instant the ladder remained poised in the air, as if it were standing of its own volition, and then began to fall—not forward, but backward among the flames with the man and the child on the topmost round.

At once the man, holding the child in his arms, leapt forward toward the street.

Breaking away from her cousin's clasp, Louise Roberts slipped through the excited crowd.

Notwithstanding that she discovered a group of men and women in a close circle about the figures of the man and child, Louise Roberts was able to push them aside.

Then she saw that John Mallory was lying apparently unconscious on the brick sidewalk; the little girl, whose body was resting upon his, was crying softly.

It was Louise who picked the child up, placing her in the arms of the village doctor. The little girl was slightly burned but without a bruise on her small white body.

In falling John Mallory had managed to hold her so that she felt the shock of their striking the ground only through his body.

Yet Louise's self control, the lack of unnecessary emotion upon which she prided herself, had mysteriously vanished. Instead of making the proper effort to aid her friend, she kept whispering his name, as if words alone could restore him to consciousness.

A moment later, having delivered the child into her father's protection, the doctor knelt beside Louise. The next instant, surprising them both, John Mallory staggered painfully to his feet, murmuring:

"Get me out of this, doctor, as quickly as possible. Tell people there is nothing the matter with me."

Then he turned imploringly to Louise Roberts.

"For old friendship's sake, Louise, help me to escape. You know I can't play at being a hero. No man on earth was ever more frightened than I when I placed my foot on the first round of that ladder."

How she managed, with the doctor and

Janet Perry's assistance, to engineer John Mallory to Janet's car and away from the crowd, Louise never thoroughly understood.

On the way to John's home, although sitting beside him, with the doctor next Janet, Louise could only recall a single remark.

"In all my life, John, I never witnessed one braver thing."

After saying good-night, they were not to meet again in many months.

CHAPTER IV

The Consolation

THE *Consolation* was to sail without a convoy, trusting to the treaty of Geneva to insure her safe passage.

The enemy having repeatedly announced that a hospital ship had never been deliberately attacked, the United States government had decided to make a test case of their first vessel built for hospital purposes alone.

Nevertheless, there was no published notice of the day she was to leave from a well-known eastern harbor, merely a reasonable degree of secrecy being preserved.

On the morning of her departure a taxicab containing five persons, following a thin stream of other taxis, drove slowly toward a secluded wharf. A few moments later, having reached the dock, the little group descended, carrying suitcases, steamer blankets, fruit and flowers, ordinary paraphernalia of ocean travelers.

The two young men in the party began stacking the luggage; and at the same time the woman and two girls moved forward to take their places in line. Before a long table, the passports of the Red Cross nurses and physicians were again to be examined.

"I declare, Bianca, even at the last moment I am not reconciled to your sailing with us as an assistant Red Cross nurse. I do not see how you managed to obtain permission, although you have a fashion of accomplishing your desires through quiet persistency."

Turning to the young girl who was standing next her, Sonya Valesky spoke with a little frown and expression of anxiety.

The girl made no reply.

"For goodness sake, don't indulge in reproaches or regrets, now, Sonya, I am convinced Bianca will prove as useful as the rest of us," Mildred Thornton protested. "Surely with us to look after her we can see that she does not overwork or get into any particular difficulty. As far as the danger is concerned, you are

mistaken in regarding Bianca as a child. She must have considered the possibilities of danger and be willing to face what comes."

In order that no one could overhear, Mildred murmured this speech in an undertone. In response Bianca, who did not often make an effort to defend herself, looked at her from under her drooping white lids with quiet gratitude.

At present Bianca was not wearing a Red Cross uniform, but a simple traveling costume, a dress of dark blue serge, a long coat of a green and blue mixture and a hat of rough straw of the same combination of colors.

Certainly she appeared younger than the other Red Cross nurses or their assistants. Among the medical corps there were several boys not many years older who were to act as hospital orderlies.

As a matter of fact, the *Consolation* carried a larger number of Red Cross physicians, nurses, hospital attendants and other Red Cross workers than she would require on her return journey when she was to

bring back the wounded American soldiers to their own land. Many of them expected to remain for hospital work in France. But the *Consolation* had no passengers save her own naval crew, members of the medical and surgical staffs of the United States army and of the Red Cross.

Half an hour later, Mildred Thornton, her brother Richard Thornton, and Bianca having gone aboard, Sonya Valesky was waiting to say a final farewell to the one person who had come to witness their moment of sailing.

Barbara Thornton had preferred to tell her husband good-bye in their own home, and Mildred and Richard Thornton had both requested that no other member of their family see them leave.

"You must be sure to accomplish wonderful things with your music while I am away, Carlo," Sonya said. "Remember you are now spoken of as the greatest of the young American tenors. You have much hard work ahead of you, yet there can be no question of your success. You are to be in the west for your concert tour this summer,

so perhaps I shall not see you on the first of our voyages back to the United States. But next winter, if all goes well, we shall meet again! You have suffered much in the past from the thought that your voice had been sacrificed to your duty as a soldier. Now I am sure your future will more than repay you. Good-bye."

Sonya Valesky put out her hand in farewell. She looked wonderfully handsome in her Red Cross traveling uniform with her white hair in striking contrast to the brilliant youthful contour of her face.

Her companion apparently disregarded her outstretched hand.

"There is no point in saying farewell at present, my dear lady," Carlo Navara answered, falling into the use of a familiar title he had been accustomed to employ in the old days in Italy. "As a matter of fact, you may see me every day, or several times a day; I am not sufficiently familiar with the regulations of daily life aboard a hospital ship to be able to say how much liberty we may be allowed."

"But, Carlo," Sonya repeated gazing at

the young man in a confused fashion and failing to comprehend his meaning, "don't look so surprised, I also am sailing on board the *Consolation*, Sonya. I have not allowed you the privilege of being the only person capable of keeping a secret. Some time ago I offered my services to the government, saying that I thought I could be useful if I were allowed to entertain the convalescent soldiers with my singing on their return voyages. I confess I scarcely believed I would be accepted for such a service, yet it seems music is regarded as of immense importance in the art of healing these days. It is supposed, particularly to help afflictions. You would be amazed, Sonya, if you knew the influence I seem able to exert. I have been singing at several New York hospitals trying to discover what music the fellows like best and how to get on with them. You see they take to me pretty well because I have been wounded myself. I have learned to sing rag-time, and barber-shop songs and every patriotic air of the war—American, British, French and Italian. So you see I have been

appointed a kind of musical doctor to the wounded and you'll find I will be worth my passage."

The young man spoke rapidly and with boyish enthusiasm.

Nevertheless, instead of appearing pleased, Sonya looked annoyed and distressed.

"But, Carlo, surely you must realize you are sacrificing your career. You cannot be intending to give up your wonderful summer concert engagements! Some one can take your place in entertaining the soldiers, but unless you continue with your singing, now that your reputation has only started, people will soon forget you. I cannot permit this."

Carlo Navara laughed; a teasing expression appearing in his brown eyes.

"It is too late to argue the question now, Sonya. Besides, my dear lady, remember you at one time scornfully refused the right to say what I should or should not do. Please go aboard now; your friends are signaling to you and I have a number of things I must look after before I come on. We are to sail in a short time."

Without waiting, Carlo walked quickly away and Sonya moved more slowly up the gang plank.

Most of the passengers were out on deck wearing Red Cross uniforms, or else the uniforms of the medical department of the United States army.

Sonya bowed and stopped to shake hands with three or four acquaintances on her way to find Mildred and Bianca. She was moving on again after one of these occasions when a large figure loomed suddenly in front of her and she heard a voice say: "How do you do, Madame. It is not surprising we meet again, now that we travel upon somewhat the same mission. I see you have decided to become a Red Cross nurse. Tell me, please, what news have you of Miss Davis? It has been a long time since I have heard any word of her."

At first, but only for an instant, Sonya did not recognize the speaker. Then she recalled Nona Davis' special friend, Dr. Latham, whom they had met first on their way to Italy and had known later in Florence.

"Nona is very well, thank you; at least, that is my latest news from her, although she rarely writes of herself. She has been nursing almost continuously in France for over a year. I think she has arranged to be transferred to our hospital ship. The change will be good for her, I am sure, and then I shall be able to discover whether she requires a rest. Are you intending to go directly to the front, or ——"

"I am to be a member of the *Consolation's* staff, one of the ship's surgeons," the big doctor interrupted. "I had seen your name on the list of our nurses. If ever I can be useful to you, for the sake of old times please call upon me."

After he moved away Sonya had a sensation of relief. She and Dr. Latham had not liked each other in their earlier meeting. He held a number of uncomfortable suspicions concerning her; yet after all he had proved their friend. He was rough and difficult, perhaps, and might be a martinet to work with, nevertheless he was just and above all brave and efficient.

Later on, after their landing in France,

the returning members of the hospital ship's staff would become one working unit. As far as possible they must understand and like one another. Moreover, they must yield as instant obedience to the commands of their superiors as if they were soldiers under the strictest military discipline.

Mildred and Bianca were not alone when Sonya joined them. They were talking to the two new Red Cross girls, who as a formality were to be in Sonya's charge. Sonya knew Janet Perry fairly well, but had not yet been introduced to her cousin.

She was struck now by the difference in the appearance of the two girls, the look of coldness and reserve in the one and of ardor and impulsiveness in the other.

"This is my cousin, Louise Roberts; I have told you the doctors at our hospital declared she was the best nurse they had graduated in the past ten years," Janet explained, reaching up on tiptoes to kiss Sonya, rather to her surprise. Yet Sonya should have grown accustomed to the enthu-

siasm and affection she created among girls years younger than herself, especially if they had a shadow of information concerning her romantic past.

"I suppose it is not necessary for Janet to explain that I am her country cousin," Louise added. She spoke shyly and awkwardly, yet Sonya saw at once what few persons recognized, that Louise's coldness was in a great measure shyness. She was not so unsympathetic or hard as most persons considered her.

A short time after Sonya and Louise wandered off together to find their quarters, taking Bianca with them.

Mildred and Janet continued standing in the same place. Mildred was waiting for her brother, Richard Thornton, who was sending a farewell telegram to his wife at the last moment. On the wharf the last orders were being given before the departure of the *Consolation*.

Janet, who was addicted to sudden fancies, had just decided that Mildred Thornton was exactly the influence she needed in her life. They had met before,

so she knew something of Mildred's character and history. She knew that Mildred had been a Red Cross nurse in Russia in the old days when the Czar's army seemed to be fighting loyally with his great western allies. She had heard that Mildred had been engaged to a distinguished Russian general a number of years her senior and that General Alexis had been made a prisoner after the revolution and since had died. Yet in spite of Mildred's grave, even sad expression, she appeared entirely self controlled. And at this very moment Janet felt that she would like to turn back from her Red Cross mission, to return to the home she had so carelessly put aside. Yet she was not a coward and did care for the career she had undertaken. Neither was she so poor a nurse as she pretended. It was merely that she was regretting sailing upon so dangerous a mission without a word of farewell or of forgiveness to the friend of whom she had been fond for many years. It was ridiculous that she and Howard Courtnay should have quarrelled simply because she had thought best to

break their engagement. If Howard had been disagreeable, accusing her of fickleness and of not regarding their love with sufficient seriousness, she might have been magnanimous.

At this instant in Janet Perry's reflections, Mildred Thornton, who had seen her brother come on board, turned to speak to her companion.

Therefore she witnessed a change in the girl's expression which was startling.

Ever since their meeting Janet had looked pale and tired. The vivacity and sparkle, which Mildred had observed in her on other occasions, had disappeared. She seemed delicate and listless, with nothing of the stamina and force Red Cross nursing demands.

Yet now Mildred thought that an electric current must suddenly have swept through her companion. She was completely transformed. Her cheeks were flaming, her figure erect, her little head with its bright bronze hair poised proudly and defiantly.

Mildred could see no reason for the change beyond the fact that a young man

in the uniform of an army chaplain was walking slowly past them, but apparently entirely uninterested. He was remarkably handsome, slender and dark, with regular features and an almost austere expression.

Janet Perry made a movement toward him. Her movements sometimes suggested a small bird's, they were so graceful and swift.

"Howard Courtnay, I shall never forgive you. I would not have believed you would follow me after our last parting! But actually to be on my hospital ship ——"

The young clergyman had stood listening to Janet's arraignment with his cap uplifted, showing a high white forehead, unlike the brown of the rest of his face. He smiled, but not agreeably.

"I am sorry you labor under such a mistaken impression, Janet. It is with the greatest reluctance I am on 'your hospital ship,' as you are pleased to call it. As a matter of fact, I would have refused if I could. But you know that I volunteered for army service as chaplain more than six months ago. When the call came, stating

that I was needed on board the hospital ship *Consolation*, I could not very well beg to be relieved on the ground that *you* were to be one of the Red Cross nurses aboard and that you were the one person in the world whom I particularly did *not* wish to see! I do not believe the fact would have interested the heads of the hospital ship department in Washington."

"You are unkind, Howard," Janet answered, with what might seem to be feminine inconsistency. "However, I do not think we need worry over meeting each other. I shall not trouble you, and after a time we shall both be so busy with our work we will not think or care about anything else."

Janet Perry walked back to where Mildred Thornton was standing, and slipping her arm through hers drew her away to another part of the deck.

At this instant the signal was given. Leaving her moorings, the first United States hospital ship slipped noiselessly out into the quiet bay. In another hour she would be at sea. The great Red Cross, sus-

pended between her funnels and painted on her sides, symbolized the heart of humanity. Her passengers recognized the peril they faced. In her newspapers Germany had made sarcastic reference to her disbelief in the honor of the United States government. There was a veiled threat in her suggestion:

“What cargo will the American hospital ship carry on the journey to Europe, having no sick or wounded on board? We fear American aviators and a dozen airplanes.”

Notwithstanding, the *Consolation* sailed without escort, disregarding the German menace.

CHAPTER V

An American Hospital in France

IT was a fair June afternoon in Normandy.

Over a long, low one-story frame building the Red Cross flag was flying. In the hospital yard there were scattered beds of poppies and green stalks where the fleur-de-lis had lately ceased to bloom. The road running by the gate was white with dust, the air itself thick with the dust and bloom.

Yet not far off sounded the heavy booming of cannon, the occasional bursting of a bomb and a shrieking, rending noise more nerve-racking than the others.

The girl walking up and down the hospital yard appeared oblivious of the uproar. Now and then there had been hours, sometimes even days and nights of comparative quiet, but always the noise had begun again, so that after a time she had become accustomed to the tumult.

Dressed in the service uniform of the Red Cross nurse, the girl must have come outdoors for a brief rest, as she revealed no other purpose in her slow walk. She looked worn and tired.

For months this American hospital near the Allied lines in France had been filled to overflowing with the wounded. There were periods when within forty-eight hours the nurses and doctors were unable to sleep more than three or four.

So there was small wonder why Nona Davis should look older and frailer than in the earlier stages of the war. Moreover, although lately she had grown more accustomed to the tragedies of the Allied retreats during the spring months and recognized them as a part of the larger strategy leading to ultimate victory, the disappointment and the strain showed in her delicate face and figure.

In the past year Nona had also faced strange personal experiences, while the only one of the original Red Cross girls to remain continuously at her post.

Eugenia, who had aided in the founding

of the hospital and been its first superintendent, had lately returned, but after a six months' leave of absence. After her husband's, Captain Castaigne's, partial recovery of his memory, she had taken him home to his mother, the Countess Amelie, and to their château in southern France. Captain Castaigne's memory had been destroyed through an injury in battle and it was in the preceding volume of the Red Cross series that he and his wife were finally united.

Mildred Thornton and Barbara Thornton had both returned, as we know, to the United States, where Barbara was to remain and where Mildred had been spending a few months with her parents preparatory to taking up her nursing again. She had been through a slight nervous breakdown after learning of the fate of General Alexis and a vacation had been necessary.

Nona Davis, however, had been too much absorbed in her work for even a brief rest. Yet recently she had been persuaded to agree to the suggestion that she was feeling the long strain of several years of nursing

and was willing at least to try a change of labor, as no Red Cross nurse could contemplate giving up her work altogether under the present conditions, unless she were too ill for any other course. If the cry for more and more nurses was insistent in the United States, the need was even greater in France, where each day added thousands to the wounded.

Even this short respite out of doors Nona feared was a breach of duty, notwithstanding that she had been sent out into the little war-worn garden for an especial reason. Inside the hospital, at the present moment, the doctors and chief nurses were making a careful selection of the wounded American soldiers who they believed should be sent "back home."

Nona Davis was to have charge of them on the journey to a port in France, where together they would go aboard the first American hospital ship. Therefore, for days past Nona's life had been a burden, because each patient demanded that she use her influence to see that he was shipped home to recover. Every soldier able to

speaker declared the only thing he required was ocean travel to complete his cure. Afterwards he would return to France and finish up the business of making the world safe for democracy.

It was not the men who would be restored to health within a few weeks who were to sail on the *Consolation*. Nona knew this if the soldiers did not. The choice would fall upon the soldiers who would require many months to regain their health and vigor. In some cases there would not be even this hope. Therefore she preferred remaining off duty during the decision, the appeal of one or two of her patients having proved hard to resist.

At this moment, becoming conscious of the sound of some one approaching, Nona paused and turned around. She was under the impression that she was to be summoned to return to her duties.

But the woman moving toward her made a gesture which she could at once interpret.

Two months before, after the first tragic weeks of the German drive in France, when the Germans had retaken so much of the

land the French and British had reconquered with such difficulty, Eugenia Castaigne had returned to her old hospital. The sacrifice had been great, for she had been obliged to leave her husband, who was still an invalid; but she considered that her duty lay among the wounded at the front.

Something in her friend's expression at this instant made Nona instinctively lay her hand upon a little wooden trellis. The trellis had been built by one of the soldiers and over it a wild honeysuckle vine, transplanted from a field, was feebly trailing.

"What is it now, Eugenia?" Nona asked, trying to keep a suggestion of discouragement from her voice. "You have not heard bad news? Have the Germans broken through again? Must we move the wounded further back?"

It was natural that Nona should make this her first question. During the tragic days in France, in all the hospitals near the front, this was the one thought uppermost in the minds of the hospital staff. With an

hour's notice they were prepared to transport both their patients and their supplies to the rear.

Eugenia shook her head.

"No, Nona, the news from the front, so far as I have been able to learn, is more cheerful today. The British line is holding, while the French are bringing up their reserves." She slipped her arm inside the girl's.

"My news concerns something else and it may prove incorrect. I do not know for certain, and I have concluded you had best be prepared."

Either one learns fortitude through years of nursing experience or, failing this, one is of no value in the work. There was no question with regard to Nona Davis, who had been tried with almost every test.

"Do you mean you have received word of the *Consolation*? The Germans have not ——"

Here Nona faltered.

Sonya Valesky, who had sailed on the *Consolation* and whom she expected to join in a few days, was not only her dearest

friend, but in the years since their departure from Russia had grown to be like an older sister. Indeed, Sonya had taken the place of the mother Nona had never known. Mildred Thornton was one of the original Red Cross girls, for whom she and Eugenia felt devoted affection.

Eugenia did not hesitate at this moment with her information, appreciating that suspense is probably the worst suffering.

"Yes, there is a report that the *Consolation* has been sunk somewhere off the French coast; I fear a good many miles out in the open sea. You remember that the Germans threatened to sink her, announcing in their newspapers that they did not believe she would carry only the Red Cross staff on her first crossing to this side. We should have heeded the German threats and sent a convoy with the *Consolation*. Strange that even at this late period of the war, after four years of German atrocities, the Allies are not able to understand the full depth of German depravity! Neither young nor old, wounded nor dying are safe. But, Nona, I did not intend this

tirade as it is a useless waste of strength. So far no news has been received regarding the passengers and crew. They must have taken to the life boats, so we can only trust——”

Eugenia did not finish her sentence, and yet Nona understood what she had failed to say.

Both of them remained silent for a moment. Eugenia's eyes were cast down toward the ground, yet she was not thinking of the little space of green earth before her gaze. Mentally her eyes were upon a vision of a vast sea filled with ships. These ships were going back and forth upon the world's greatest errand. Then she pictured a number of smaller boats adrift in a vast ocean. Would help come to them from larger vessels, or must they sleep with the silent company who lately had gone down to their resting place under the sea?

In a measure these same impressions and ideas were in Nona's mind, yet instead of looking down, unconsciously she had lifted her head toward the sky.

Overhead it was a blue and silver day in

France. So exquisite, so still were the light clouds they seemed scarcely to move. There were days in the neighborhood of the hospital when the air was filled with the smoke of the great guns hammering at their tasks not many miles away. Several times evil gases had crawled over the ground or been wafted in suffocating waves toward the hospital. But at present there was no suggestion of these annoyances and dangers. There were only the noises to make one realize a battle was raging intermittently within a limited number of miles.

Nevertheless, if Nona's thoughts were with Sonya and Mildred at this moment, her eyes were keenly, even if unconsciously aware of the spectacle of the sky. Before either she or Eugenia had spoken again, Nona saw an aeroplane slip out from behind a cloud and pause as if it were hovering above the hospital.

At the same instant a bomb was thrown out and fell plunging and tearing its way through the quiet air.

Nona's movement was instinctive. In the little time she was not conscious of an

idea behind her action. Throwing her arms suddenly about her companion and pressing the entire weight of her body against her with unexpected force, she and Eugenia went down upon their hands and knees, Nona's body forming a shield for her friend's.

A few yards away the bomb buried itself in the little bed of poppies, afterwards there was a slight explosion and a heap of upturned scarlet flowers.

"Nona, that was an unforgivable act on your part. If the bomb had struck one of us it must have been you and I should never have forgiven you," Eugenia protested, as she and Nona rose to their feet without a great appearance of dignity.

Nona laughed. They were both accustomed by this time to being in the midst of war's alarms. By this time the German aviator had sailed on.

"Forgive me, Gene, I suppose it was not polite of me to jump on you in such a surprising fashion. But please remember you are a very useful person these days, and if one of us had to be chosen I should have preferred it to be my turn."

Without pausing for further discussion of the subject or for Madame Castaigne to expostulate again, Nona moved swiftly away.

Eugenia followed more slowly.

She would miss Nona intensely, yet she would be glad when Nona had found work outside the hospital.

If the *Consolation* had gone down and Sonya and Mildred and their friends were among the lost, nevertheless Nona must have a change of scene and of work. She was not only weary, she was extremely unhappy over some personal matter which she did not wish to confide.

Soon after her return to her place at the hospital, Eugenia had become aware of this fact, yet had asked no questions.

One wonders if Nona would have told, if her friend had demanded her confidence. As a matter of fact, Nona believed she was taking her personal sorrows half humorously. By this time she considered that she possessed a talent for unfortunate love affairs.

Nearly a year ago, when Philip Dawson

had said farewell to her in this same little garden behind the American hospital before sailing for the United States, she had not accepted his offer of marriage. Yet before many hours had passed she had made up her mind that she seriously cared for him and wished to be his wife. As soon as a second opportunity arose she would tell him. Yet the opportunity had not arrived and never would. From the moment of his leaving the garden Nona had heard no word of any kind. No letter from Philip Dawson had been received and no message. So far as she could hear he had never returned to continue his work as an American newspaper correspondent in France, nor had she heard whether he had been sent into another country or remained at home.

Nona's friend, Captain Martin, whom she had nursed in the hospital for a few weeks, had been more considerate. After his return to the front, in the first few months he had written her whenever there was a chance that she might receive his letters. They had simply been friendly letters and he had not referred to his

former affection for her. Yet recently Captain Martin's letters had ceased and Nona supposed that other interests had made her pass from his thoughts.

One scarcely wonders that she did not wish to confide the failure of her double house of dreams.

CHAPTER VI

The Landing

AT that moment there was no busier place in the world than the new seaport town the Americans were building for their own use in France. Out of the waste lands adjacent to the old French port they had constructed a splendid line of modern docks and behind them a military city.

Standing near the end of one of these docks an American girl was gazing out over the water, one hand shading her eyes. On either side were other docks piled hundreds of feet high with every variety of supplies and war materials. There were mountains of food in tin and wooden boxes; further along were cases of ammunition. On another dock sections of steel cars and aeroplanes were ready to be hauled away, and assembled at some distant point.

Owing to the fact that she was a Red

Cross nurse, Nona Davis had been given special permission to walk out on the long pier.

A few moments before, an American transport had come alongside an adjacent pier and the soldiers were at present marching ashore. As the ship was not the one she had hoped to see, for a moment Nona had turned away her gaze. Now the interest of seeing the latest contingent of American soldiers arrive on French soil compelled her to turn again to watch them.

What splendid fellows they were, bronzed, steadfast and serious, with boyish exultation only halfway concealed behind their firm lips and their confident, curious eyes!

Nona felt the thrill which always came to her at the spectacle of a division of American troops in France, although, perhaps, she should have grown accustomed to the sight in the past year. But in spite of the fact that she had seen many troops of soldiers marching through the French country to their places in the line, and had lived close to a French village where they

were quartered, besides nursing many of the wounded, yet this was her first opportunity to observe them come ashore.

With several hundred thousand American soldiers arriving in France each month, the people along the quay had become more familiar with the scene than Nona Davis. Yet there was no suggestion that they were any the less enthusiastic.

Even the busiest of the onlookers ceased work for a moment to shout a welcome.

Leaning over the railing of the pier, Nona studied the faces intently. At a distance and in their khaki uniforms the soldiers appeared oddly alike, although one realized that coming from the north, south, east and west of the United States they represented many different types of men, of different experiences and social training.

Nona wondered if by any chance she should see a familiar face. Many times this same thought had occurred to her in her accidental meetings with American soldiers in France. They looked so like the young men to whom she had been accustomed all her life and were such a

contrast to their Allies, one could not feel them in any sense strangers.

Then Nona smiled at her own folly. After all, her acquaintance in the United States, outside of her own native city of Charleston, South Carolina, was by no means large. There was not one chance in a thousand that she would recognize an acquaintance.

The soldiers were going ashore, marching down the gangplank two abreast and carrying their rifles and kits. They moved with long swinging strides and with their heads up in military fashion.

For more than an hour Nona watched them march past. Once ashore, some of them entered the American trains waiting for them on American-built tracks and were transferred to their new training camps. An artillery corps was the last to leave the transport. They were to occupy a new artillery camp nearby which had just been completed.

A little later only a few officers and the ship's crew remained aboard. Then they began to disembark in a more leisurely

fashion, Nona determined to watch them till the last.

Finally she saw a figure in the uniform of a captain, who at first attracted her attention by his distinctly *unmilitary* bearing. He was moving with his shoulders lifted, his head bent slightly forward, as if his ideas were always in advance of his movements. In spite of a certain uncouthness and lack of grace, there was something arresting in his appearance.

Nona was not conscious of how intently she was staring. Yet by the law which seems to impel one human being to turn his eyes toward the eyes regarding him, the instant the man stepped ashore, he swung completely around to look in Nona Davis's direction.

What he saw was the figure of a girl standing alone on a wind-swept pier with the June sunshine flooding her, and her nurse's uniform wrapped by the wind closely about her slender figure. There were no other women or girls near and no men, since the pier was at the time not in use except for storage purposes.

In spite of the distance, Nona at this instant recognized Philip Dawson. She understood why he was wearing a captain's uniform, an accredited newspaper correspondent being entitled to an officer's rank.

Her first sensation was one of panic. There was no human being she so little desired to see. Philip Dawson had chosen to end their friendship in a fashion which for a long time had kept her wounded and unhappy. Naturally he had the right to do as he wished, yet she also had the right not to care to renew their acquaintance.

A moment later she regained her self-control. At such a distance and not expecting to see her, there was small reason to believe Philip Dawson would also recognize her. If by any possibility he should, it would not seriously matter. Evidently he had come abroad with this consignment of American troops to resume his former position as correspondent with the American army at the front. Doubtless he would leave the neighborhood of the little seaport town immediately, while in a short space of

time Nona expected to sail for the United States.

The report of the sinking of the *Consolation* by a German submarine had proved an error. Later, a wireless had been received that all was well aboard and the ship was expected to enter port at any hour of the day or night.

It was for this reason that Nona had been waiting and watching from the long pier. Two days before, with twenty wounded American soldiers who were to return home on the *Consolation*, she had arrived in the little town where the first American hospital ship was to dock.

She had not made the trip alone, but had been accompanied by a hospital staff physician and by Mollie Drew, a Red Cross nurse who had traveled to Europe with Nona a year before and had since been working in the same hospital.

Now for a brief time Philip Dawson continued gazing stupidly in the direction of the pier where Nona stood, apparently a disinterested spectator. Then without a movement of any kind to suggest recogni-

tion, he joined a fellow officer and together the two men moved away.

A quarter of an hour longer the girl lingered, sitting down upon a bundle of cordage and resting her chin in her hands. She was tired and hungry and realized that it was the luncheon hour and that she was overstaying her leave, nevertheless she preferred taking no chances of an inopportune meeting.

Until the hour of sailing she was a guest at a magnificent new American hospital, recently erected on the outskirts of the little French town, perhaps a mile from the docks, not more. This hospital was to serve as a shelter for the wounded, where they were to be cared for until going aboard the hospital ships.

Finally, a little past twelve o'clock, Nona started to walk rapidly toward her new quarters.

Every square of the small town appeared to be in use for some military purpose. During her walk down to the water's edge earlier in the day, Nona had been intensely interested in each sight her eyes rested

upon. Never in her life had she beheld so fine an expression of American energy and efficiency! Yet now she showed no interest, save in reaching the hospital as quickly as possible.

At first she passed a number of dock laborers, negro stevedores, who had a huge camp nearby so as to be on hand for the loading and unloading of the ships. They were at present having their mid-day meal of their accustomed substantial American food instead of the French *déjeuner*.

Occasionally she encountered a convalescent soldier or another Red Cross worker.

Finally Nona arrived at a small green park in front of the new one-storied hospital.

Standing waiting for her approach was Philip Dawson. There was no mistaking his intention, nor could Nona turn aside.

He came directly toward her, his clear, keen gray eyes studying her face.

Nona held out her hand.

"You are back at your old work. I am glad for your sake, as I know you enjoy it. Yet I was surprised to see you come ashore so unexpectedly this morning." The

girl spoke politely as if she were merely greeting an acquaintance.

"Then you did see me come ashore—I was not certain," Philip Dawson answered. "Nona, I may have to leave here within twenty-four hours and I must see and have a talk with you. When can it be arranged?"

Nona shook her head.

"I am sorry, but it is impossible," she replied. "I am so busy here at the hospital and am sailing soon for home. Good-bye."

Then moving on, Nona entered the hospital without turning her head.

There was a finality both in her words and manner which left her companion no opportunity for pleading or for remonstrance. Moreover, Nona intended the good-bye to end their acquaintance.

CHAPTER VII

Afloat with the Flag

JUST after twilight, in the aftermath between daylight and darkness, the *Consolation* slid into the French port.

Several hours before, a wireless announcing her approach had been received so that the shore was lined with an eager crowd awaiting her entrance.

Nona had come down to the coast again, this time not alone but surrounded by a group of convalescent soldiers who had insisted upon accompanying her. Mollie Drew also was with her and as many members of the staff of the new American hospital as could be spared from duty.

Many transport ships, hastily rearranged and adapted for hospital service, had borne the American wounded back to their own land, but this was the first United States hospital ship, constructed for hospital uses only, to touch the shores of France.

In spite of the fact that darkness had not fallen, the lights were ablaze on the *Consolation* and her flags flying. Thus, without an escort and without arms, she had braved the dangers of her first crossing to test Germany's respect for the Red Cross. What perils she may have encountered and how she may have escaped them, had not yet been related and perhaps might never be.

As she entered the harbor one could see that she was a slender, graceful ship of about ten thousand tons, freshly painted white and green, the colors chosen for hospital ships at the General convention.

From the upper deck, as the *Consolation* drew nearer the land, Nona beheld a long blue scarf being waved in the air. This was the expected signal from Sonya.

Suddenly Nona felt an inclination to tears, yet she was by no means sympathetic with this feminine weakness. Moreover, years of Red Cross nursing must teach one to hide the outward manifestations of sorrow. Nona's excuse was that she had lately passed through two

days and nights of painful suspense when she had believed the *Consolation* to have gone down and cherished but faint hope of seeing either Mildred or Sonya again. Now the reaction naturally affected her. Moreover, she had been stirred more than she would have confessed, by her chance meeting with Philip Dawson.

But at this moment Nona's attention was distracted and that of every one else in the crowd.

Half a dozen of the negro stevedores, waiting along the shore, had begun a low musical chant: "Swing low, sweet chariot, Swing low, sweet chariot."

A moment later a dozen other voices joined in, then a greater number until finally there were between fifty and a hundred voices singing together all along the shore line, where the men were either working or resting after their day's labors.

Afterwards the chant changed to "Dixie." When the *Consolation* at length touched her pier it was to the music of "Cinnamon seed and sandy bottom," surely unexpected words to greet one on entering

France. But then the sight of the familiar dark faces shining with enthusiasm to welcome their own people was equally unexpected.

Later, Sonya and Nona walked up to the hospital together. The medical staff from the ship and the other nurses had been driven up in motors sent down to the wharf for the purpose. The naval staff remained aboard, for within thirty-six hours the wounded were transferred to the ship.

"I was surprised to find Bianca and Carlo on board the *Consolation* with you," Nona exclaimed, as they moved along in the late dusk together, arm in arm. "It is like Italy again!"

Sonya shrugged her shoulders.

"You cannot be more surprised, Nona, than I was almost up to the moment of sailing. I have never really approved of Bianca's joining the hospital ship staff. If she wished to do Red Cross work the opportunities in the United States are increasing every day. But with Carlo I had not even the opportunity to protest.

He did not tell me until just before we sailed. It will be a curious experience, Nona, nursing aboard a ship, even for you who have had so much Red Cross experience. I never knew to what extent a ship could be a little world in itself. Already, with only the one crossing, we have developed friendships and rivalries and antagonisms.

"You understand that we have the two distinct departments on board, the naval and the medical, and they are not supposed to interfere with each other. But I think you will like both Captain Wells and the commanding surgeon, Dr. Clark. They have been very kind to me, although of course one realizes circumstances and conditions will be different on our return, when we shall have the care of the wounded. Of course our trip across was almost a pleasure trip, if one dares speak of a pleasure trip these days."

"But, Sonya, was there not trouble of some kind? Why should news reach us here in France that the *Consolation* had been torpedoed?" Nona inquired. "As a

result Eugenia and I spent a number of unhappy hours."

The older woman shook her head.

"Please don't ask questions, not even if you hear mysterious rumors on our homeward journey. It is most important, we were told, that no news of what occurred is ever divulged. I do not pretend to understand the reason, but one realizes we are soldiers at present and must obey our superior officers. I confess, I sometimes find it difficult, as I have not been in training sufficiently long to become accustomed to discipline. I wonder how I shall endure being ordered about by your friend, Dr. Latham, who is our Medical Inspector?"

Nona laughed.

"I thought you and Dr. Latham had learned to like each other better during the latter part of our stay in Italy. As a matter of fact, he is an exceedingly just person to work with, if one does not mind his gruffness now and then. Personally, I am delighted he is one of the surgeons in charge of the *Consolation*. But tell me

about the nurses, particularly your two friends, Miss Roberts and Miss Perry. If you go on adopting strange young women to take shelter under your wing, Sonya, in the fashion you have been doing of late I shall feel as if I were of no importance. You realize that I am jealous and want the most of you for myself. You see, I have no one else, Sonya. But that is scarcely a polite fashion of expressing my need for you, is it?"

Nona spoke with an effort at gaiety. But indeed she and Sonya understood each other and were talking of other persons with the deliberate intention of concealing their excitement and emotion at meeting after a year's separation.

To Nona, Sonya had never seemed more beautiful or more alluring. She was one of the women whom age apparently rendered more charming. But Sonya's earlier life had been difficult and dangerous and it was only since her escape from Russia, after a sentence to life imprisonment, that she had been able to live in comfort and serenity. She had not intended taking

any part in war work, and indeed for some time had resisted the call, convinced that she had earned the right to rest. Then the demand for Red Cross nurses became too insistent to be ignored.

Immediately after landing, Sonya had observed that Nona looked thin and tired, but she was under the impression this was entirely due to the long tension of the nursing. Nona had confided little of her personal emotions within the past year, and there was to be no opportunity for intimate conversation for some time.

The day following, Nona Davis devoted to acting as guide to a number of the new nurses who were spending twenty-four hours in the little French town, now changed into an American base, before going back to their posts on board the *Consolation* to be ready for the reception of the wounded.

When Nona went aboard she learned that the *Consolation* was arranged to carry three hundred wounded, and had a naval and medical and hospital staff of nearly a hundred. The ship was equipped with every convenience of an up-to-date hospital,

with its own operating room and sterilizing plant and X-ray apparatus.

The ship was also divided into a number of wards. Nona was told, rather to her regret, that she was to devote her attention to the men who were suffering from shell shock. As she had no practical experience with this character of nursing, she was a little fearful of her own ability.

Louise Roberts and Janet Perry were also to nurse in the same ward, which Louise regretted equally, as her training had been of another character.

In spite of her shorter time of study and lack of experience, Sonya Valesky was ordered to assist in the operating room.

She did not realize there was a personal motive behind this appointment.

Yet, when a limited number of persons live close to one another, personal attractions and antagonism appear impossible to avoid.

Without mentioning the fact even to Nona, Sonya suspected that the chief nurse aboard the *Consolation*, a Miss Blackstone, had conceived a dislike for her. She had

become aware of a curious animosity in her manner a few days after their sailing from New York.

At first Sonya had not the least idea of the reason for this dislike. Later she had a slight suspicion which she chose not to encourage.

Miss Blackstone would certainly not allow any personal attitude to interfere with the efficiency of the nursing service aboard the *Consolation*. And Sonya intended to do her utmost to gain her favor by proving a greater success with her nursing than Miss Blackstone seemed to anticipate.

CHAPTER VIII

Several Days Later

ONE afternoon several days after sailing from France, Nona Davis came out of her ward, which was a little set apart from the other quarters of the ship, down toward the end of one of the corridors.

She had half an hour of leisure and wished to be out in the air. The past twenty-four hours had been rough and she was only a fairly good sailor.

Once forward on the promenade deck she found the sky a deep blue and the sun shining in spite of the high wind. The watch stood both at starboard and port and Captain Wells was at his post in the lookout.

Regardless of the fact that the *Consolation* was supposed to be free from the danger of submarine attack, there was no relaxing of the motto of the sea—eternal vigilance. When the waves were high and choppy, as

they were this afternoon, there was greater difficulty in seeing small objects at any distance away.

However, there was apparently no interest given to the question of possible danger to the *Consolation*, save by the officers and crew whose business it was to safeguard the others. The physicians and nurses and hospital attendants were sufficiently occupied with the care of the wounded.

This afternoon when Nona appeared on deck she found a number of other people there.

A group of convalescent soldiers were seated in steamer chairs, talking and joking and probably feeling gayer than in many a long day with the thought they were soon to be at home among their own families and friends, after having won their spurs as United States soldiers.

"There goes the prettiest Red Cross nurse aboard," one of the men announced, when Nona had passed out of hearing, after bowing and smiling in a friendly fashion.

"Nonsense, Burton, you think the same

thing of every nurse you see, you are so confoundedly grateful for having been pulled through that last stroke of bad luck. You will be marrying a nurse some day if you can persuade one of them to have you."

The young fellow who had spoken first shook his head and flushed.

"Not much, when I have only one arm left to fight the world with, I won't ask a woman to help me out more than she has done already."

He used the word "she" with such unconsciousness that for some reason the group of men to whom he was unknowingly confiding his secret did not laugh. They seemed to understand that he had left behind him in France what might have been an interrupted romance.

"You never were much of a judge of beauty, Burton," one of the other soldiers protested, in order to keep the conversation from lapsing into seriousness. "What about little Miss Perry? I thought I was all in when I came aboard the *Consolation*—nerves all gone—did not believe I could

ever learn to walk or talk much better than a baby, and yet after a few days of her nursing and her cheerful conversation I feel like a different man. Oh, I realize I don't amount to much at present; you fellows saw her helping me up on deck and stowing me away in this steamer chair. But what she does is to brace a man up and somehow give him courage. She is a wonder!"

If Nona Davis could have overheard this speech she would have unhesitatingly agreed. So far in their nursing experience, Janet Perry was easily the most successful. Nona had been amazed by Janet's skill and equally disappointed in herself and in Louise Roberts. But then the care of soldiers suffering from shell shock requires a different order of talents. At present there was no doubt Janet Perry seemed better able to understand and respond to the needs of the nerve-racked men.

For a few moments Nona continued walking up and down the deck alone. She was glad to have no stranger join her. Sonya and Mildred Thornton she had scarcely seen more than a few moments since the sailing of the *Consolation*.

She was worried for fear Sonya might be having a difficult time. Personally she had grown accustomed to the Red Cross nursing, and yet the work on board ship was more trying than on land. After a time this would probably not prove true, yet one must first become physically accustomed to life at sea. This afternoon, for instance, Nona had been seasick, yet now the cool air had revived her and she was glad to remember that at least Sonya was an excellent sailor.

Nona paused for a moment. She observed Dr. Latham was walking toward her with the chief nurse. He and Miss Blackstone had been deeply engaged in conversation, yet the doctor had taken the time to smile and nod to her.

He stopped presently and shook hands, although they had met a number of times in the last few days.

"We are fortunate, Miss Blackstone, to have Miss Davis on board to help with the nursing," Dr. Latham said cordially. "You see I have worked with her before in Italy and she can always be trusted."

The chief nurse gave a little nod which she probably intended to be friendly. Then she said, with a little edge to her voice which made one suspect she had double meaning:

"I wish I had an equally good recommendation for some of my other nurses. It really is amazing, Dr. Latham, at this stage of the war, that we should continue to have incompetent persons allowed to occupy responsible positions. I was beginning to hope we had weeded out the women who were merely seeking excitement and adventure. They may be very charming and have extremely romantic histories, but neither thing makes them efficient."

One could scarcely say that Miss Blackstone was charming. There was no suggestion about her robust middle-aged person of romantic past or present, nevertheless she did have an appearance which suggested capability. In fact, she had been superintendent of a New York hospital, in which Dr. David Clark, at present the commanding officer and surgeon of the *Consolation*, had been one of the directors and operating surgeons.

She moved on now, leaving Dr. Latham and Nona together.

At once there was a change in the big doctor's expression which Nona did not altogether like. She hoped he had forgotten his past fancy for her which he had expressed more in his attitude than in actual words.

He shook his head now in the fashion she so well recalled, as if he were a great Newfoundland dog.

"Still traveling with your Russian friends, Miss Nona! I should have supposed by this time you two women would have quarreled. In fact, I hoped you would."

Nona flushed angrily.

"I was under the impression you had ceased to feel a prejudice against Sonya Valesky, Dr. Latham. You have never had any foundation for your dislike. At the time you, in a measure, suspected Sonya of disloyalty you found out how utterly wrong you were. But I do not wish to discuss my friend with you. She is much more than an ordinary friend to me, and as a matter of fact is no longer a

Russian. By her own choice she has become a naturalized American. If there is any unkindness shown her in the Red Cross work aboard the *Consolation* I shall be angry and grieved. And I count on your sense of justice to defend us both."

Dr. Latham smiled, amused at Nona's evident anger.

"Oh, I spoke too strongly," he apologized. "I have no real prejudice against your charming friend. In fact, I admire her, but I was thinking of her in the capacity of a Red Cross nurse. Fact is, Miss Blackstone seems to consider she has not had enough experience or training for her present task. She does not wish me to mention her opinion to Clark, but I should not do that in any case. If I was hoping you had separated from her it was because I feel she has more influence upon you than I might wish her to have under certain unlikely circumstances."

Then the big doctor lumbered away, as clumsy in his actions as his speech had been, leaving Nona feeling vaguely annoyed.

She was beginning to guess a little more

than she had actually seen with her own eyes and intended to warn Sonya. Evidently Dr. David Clark, the commanding officer, had shown some admiration for Sonya of which the chief nurse did not approve. Sonya was agreeable and cultured and many persons considered her beautiful. Dr. Clark had probably done nothing more than talk to her during the passage across to France when he was not particularly engaged. Sonya had possibly not even observed his interest, yet it might be wise under the circumstances for her to discourage any friendliness.

But then Nona wondered when would she have an opportunity for a quiet talk with Sonya. This appeared out of the question under the present circumstances.

At this moment Nona felt she must return to her patients. She was about to withdraw from the deck when Bianca came running toward her looking pale and frightened.

"Sonya has just fainted in the operating room. Please come to her if you can manage. The worst of it is Carlo saw her as

she was being taken into her state-room and behaved absurdly. There is nothing Sonya would dislike so much as having Carlo make her conspicuous. He is such a foolish boy."

In spite of her uneasiness, Nona could not avoid feeling amused at Bianca's tone, as if she were much the older and the chaperone.

"Do you care a great deal for Sonya?" Nona inquired, as she followed the younger girl toward Sonya's state-room.

"Yes, I do care for her, although you probably do not think me capable of much real affection." Bianca spoke in her usual even tone without resentment or passion. "But perhaps some day I shall prove that I am not the child or the doll people prefer to imagine me."

As Bianca faced her, Nona was again reminded of an image the young girl often recalled to her fancy. Bianca was like a little fair lake enclosed amid delicate, airy trees and flowers and with a smooth unruffled surface. Yet if one were to make a sounding the lake might reveal unexpected depth.

"What did Carlo do that made you fear he showed too much anxiety over Sonya?" Nona continued questioning, realizing that Bianca's temporary impulse toward confidence had passed and that one could gain no more information from her save by insistence.

"Oh, nothing, except that he followed the nurses who carried Sonya out of the operating room, demanding to know if there was anything serious the matter. Perhaps I should not have worried except that the chief nurse, Miss Blackstone, made her appearance at the same moment. She seemed much annoyed over the situation. Of course, Sonya's breakdown was unfortunate; a nurse has no right to give trouble when she is expected to shoulder the burdens."

Nona smiled. "Out of the mouths of babes," she whispered to herself, but not so Bianca could hear.

After all it was not Bianca who so far had failed in her work, in spite of Sonya's fears and predictions. The young girl was proving an admirable aid to the nurses

and tireless in her attention and devotion to the convalescent soldiers to whom she gave the greater part of her time. One would scarcely have expected a young girl reared as Bianca had been, unaccustomed to work of any character, to show such strength of will and fortitude.

As for Sonya, she was as much chagrined over her breakdown as it was possible to be and could find no excuse for herself, when Nona managed to spend a few moments alone with her.

Dr. David Clark, the commanding surgeon, had ordered her to assist him at an important operation. The boy who was operated upon was very young and had clung to Sonya before taking the anesthetic, begging her to save him.

Sonya did not urge this demand upon her sympathy in her own defense, although mentioning the fact to Nona. She knew there is nothing which can justify a nurse's failure at the moment of duty.

"I presume when we arrive in New York, I shall be asked to find other Red Cross work for which I am more suited,

Nona. Well, I deserve to be dismissed. Perhaps it would have been wiser if I had kept to my former resolution and taken no part in public work again," was the conclusion of Sonya's discouraged confession.

CHAPTER IX

A Character Study

SO weary had Janet Perry become that she believed she could never be sufficiently rested.

With only a few hours' sleep she had been on duty for the past twenty-four hours, although, in a measure, this was her own wish, Louise and Nona having both offered to relieve her.

One of Janet's patients having an attack of acute delirium would only remain quiet if she were beside him. However, in the past hour he had recovered consciousness and fallen asleep, so that at last she was free.

She had intended going directly to her state-room, but observing a door opening upon a sheltered corner of the deck and an empty steamer chair, she dropped into it for a few moments. There was no one near, a fresh salt wind was blowing which

had influenced the other travelers on deck to seek the sunshine.

After drawing her feet up upon the ledge of the chair and placing her head against the chair back, involuntarily Janet closed her eyes, shutting out the too brilliant glitter of light upon the surface of the water.

Immediately she had the sensations of a small child, curling herself in some corner for a brief rest while gaining sufficient courage to make the journey to bed.

As she lay there little childish pictures and images began to float before the girl's mind.

Naturally she recalled her first trip to Europe many years before. What a tiresome fashion she then had of slipping away from her nurse and parents to hide in some out-of-the-way place until a grown-up person came to find her. One day she had been really lost for a long, long time until at length an Irish sailor with the bluest eyes and the blackest hair she had ever seen had rescued her. Afterwards they had become great friends. He was probably an old man by this time.

Then Janet began thinking of her dear old home in Philadelphia which had belonged to her father's people for several generations. As she was the only child, if she lived, it would be hers some day. The same habit of running away from home had possessed her there. Frequently the neighborhood children used to be sent to search for her. Once Howard Courtney, who was several years her senior, and whom she regarded as very old in those days, had been asked to discover her. Janet remembered being dragged home in ignominious tears, while Howard lectured her upon her evil ways as she attempted to escape.

A slight movement of Janet's heavy upcurled eyelashes and a twitching of her lips announced that she was smiling in her half day dreams.

How good Howard Courtney had been even as a small boy and what a contrast always to her own waywardness! It was absurd for them to have believed even for a short interval that they could continue to care for each other to the point of marriage. Yet once their brief engagement

was broken, Janet realized that she had been equally absurd in making so determined an effort to avoid a meeting.

On shipboard there had been none of the expected difficulty.

On the way across, Howard must have deliberately kept out of her path, spending his leisure with new friends. Since sailing from France she had seen him only two or three times on entering the saloon dining-room at the hours appointed for meals. But she had not spoken, only passed him on the way to her own place; on other occasions she had been too much engaged to leave her soldiers.

With a combination of amusement and spite Janet suddenly questioned how great a success the Rev. Howard Courtnay was proving with the wounded men? They were a little difficult sometimes.

Howard was easily disturbed. At least she had been able to annoy him readily enough, and although on some occasions she had meant to be trying, on others she had been entirely innocent of offence.

The Rev. Howard Courtnay was an unus-

ually successful clergyman with a fashionable parish, but Janet knew that his congregations were composed of more women than men. As an army chaplain his problem would be a different one. The soldiers had been face to face with life and death sometimes in its cruelest and ugliest forms. Religion had to be brought as close to them and made as real as the sights and scenes through which they had passed.

Perhaps, after all, as a chaplain, Howard would not be so superior to her as a Red Cross nurse. In any case she was not so readily upset by human failings, possessing so many faults of her own.

Then Janet opened her eyes for a moment.

Through a haze of sunshine and of reminiscence she had the impression that she could see the figure of her former friend walking up and down the deck alone.

This was odd behavior! Why was he not making friends with the soldiers who, when they did not require spiritual aid, always needed entertainment? Only when they were weary or bored, not when they

were in actual pain, did they lose their humor and courage.

But again Janet's eyelids grew heavy, so that she was not certain of her impression. She would rest only five minutes more and then surely she would be feeling less languid and stupid and would seek her state-room.

But within another five minutes her half waking and half dreaming visions had vanished and she was asleep.

Later, the Rev. Howard Courtnay, about to make his way to one of the sick wards, discovered Janet in the steamer chair entirely unconscious of her surroundings. A stranger would have paused for an instant to gaze at her.

In spite of her nurse's uniform she suggested a little girl, oddly fascinating, although not particularly pretty. Asleep, with the changing blue of her eyes hidden and the vivacity of her expression gone, the irregularity of Janet's features was apparent, the wide, deeply curved mouth, the small nose. Today not only was her usual pallor more conspicuous, the color had even disappeared from her lips. Yet

in spite of her youthful figure there were lines of weariness in her face.

The young clergyman frowned. So far as he could remember, never in her life had Janet Perry done anything with proper moderation. As a society girl she had attended too many parties, had too many admirers, been too much engrossed with what seemed to him mere worldly interests. Now the war had driven Janet to deciding that the old frivolous life was no longer worth while, she was probably throwing herself into her Red Cross work with as little prudence. However, if this were true, there was a possibility she would not prove so complete a failure as a nurse as he had originally anticipated, although at present it was difficult to judge whether Janet's weariness was due to discouragement or physical exhaustion.

At this instant the girl shivered slightly and again the young man frowned. A few moments later, with infinite caution so that the sleeper might not be disturbed, Janet was covered with a warm steamer rug.

During the afternoon other persons must

have observed her without making an effort to arouse her, in spite of the fact that one would scarcely expect to find a Red Cross nurse asleep out of doors the length of a summer afternoon. Yet so plainly did the girl reveal that she had earned the right to rest that even when Miss Blackstone, the chief nurse on board the *Consolation*, chanced to walk past and see her, she made no effort to order her to her own quarters.

Just before sunset, with the sound of the ship's bell, Janet awakened.

Her cap had become awry; indeed, her entire nurse's costume presented a distinctly unprofessional appearance. Incredible that it could have grown so late, and yet Janet felt convinced that she had heard the four bells indicating six o'clock aboard ship!

Besides, there was a conspicuous change in the atmosphere, and the sky and sea proclaimed the late afternoon. The sunlight had slipped away from the surface of the great ocean which only a little while before had been lit with its shining splendor. Now toward the west, the sky and sea were a pale gold. A little later it would be dinner time.

Janet jumped to her feet, stiff from her position, yet delightfully rested from the hours in the fresh air. Discovering the steamer rug about her, she began folding it carefully. Some one had been playing good Samaritan, and yet Janet felt no proper sense of gratitude. Instead she was chagrined. What a spectacle of a Red Cross nurse's devotion to duty and to discipline she must have presented to have remained asleep in full sight of every passenger aboard the *Consolation*!

Janet pictured herself an object of polite amusement to the ship's crew, to the convalescent soldiers and the Red Cross staff. It was unkind that no one had troubled to arouse her.

At this point in her reflections she had finished her small task, and at the same instant her attention was attracted by two large letters embroidered on one end of the steamer blanket which she was about to carry indoors. The letters were H. C. They might represent the initials of some one else, yet Janet was convinced that they were the work of some admiring parishioner,

who had presented the blanket to the ship's chaplain.

Holding the blanket under one arm, she started along the deck, trusting no one would pay any attention to her and that she would be able to reach her state-room without being interrupted.

Without being observed Janet paused involuntarily.

A number of soldiers were seated in a group toward the ship's prow forming an interesting tableau. The circle was composed of several officers and half a dozen privates, all seriously wounded men, some of whom would bear the scars of their country's service so long as they lived.

In their midst, conspicuous partly through the fact that he was standing and looking strong and vigorous, while the wounded men were in invalid chairs, was the Rev. Howard Courtnay. Janet saw that his face was white, his lips firmly closed and his dark eyes burning. There was no doubting that for some reason he was deeply aroused.

"Look here, Courtnay, no disrepect,

but why were you preaching fellows not in the draft with the rest of us who were sent across to fight in France? Are you too good for a soldier's job?"

This was the first question Janet overheard. It was asked in a half-joking, half-serious fashion by a young Irish-American soldier, whose eyes were blindfolded and who would never see the light again.

Janet knew that no one could answer him discourteously, yet she wished the Rev. Howard Courtnay would reply in the same half-joking, half-serious fashion in which he had been questioned. However, Janet recognized that the gratification of her desire was impossible. Whatever had gone before, the young clergyman was now sincerely in earnest. Besides, the girl knew from past experience that Howard Courtnay had never a sufficient sense of humor. This had caused most of their misunderstandings and unhappiness and would probably prove disastrous to his success with the soldiers.

Yet Janet felt a sudden surprising flaring partisanship. She would have liked to

reply for the young clergyman, yet this was impossible.

"A man is not a coward because he is a clergyman. We did not claim exemption from war service for any such reason," the young army chaplain replied, revealing too much indignation to win respect in an argument.

"As a matter of fact, many of the students who intended entering the ministry are in the army. Others who were already preaching have volunteered for the regular service. I asked for the privilege of entering the army as a chaplain rather than a soldier, not because I was trying to save myself from the danger and the hard work you men have been facing, but because I——"

At this critical instant the young minister hesitated.

Observing him flush, Janet understood what he had intended saying and why he had hesitated, yet it was more than doubtful whether his audience would understand.

Janet felt like stamping her foot with irritation, as she had been known to do in times past when her former friend proved

particularly irritating. Was he going to break down and so lose his opportunity for convincing the men with whom he was talking that, whatever his failures, he was in no sense a coward?

"Come, Mr. Courtney, don't stop with a 'because.' You are not a woman and we cannot be put off with a 'because' instead of a reason. Why have you chosen to be an army chaplain instead of an out-and-out scrapper like the rest of us before we were knocked out? Do you feel it a sin against your profession of peace and good will toward men to turn fighter?"

The lieutenant who asked this question spoke gravely.

There was a slight silence before the response came and again Janet had an opportunity to feel disturbed. There was no man less of a pacifist than Howard Courtney. Indeed, for some time before he had protested that the day had arrived when the word pacifist should be banished temporarily from the English language. There were left at present only the men and women willing to do their duty and those who were cowards and shirkers.

Under the circumstances not for a moment should the soldiers before him, who had given more than their lives, be allowed to believe he did not honor their soldiers' profession.

"I want to be honest; at first when the war in Europe began I do not think I would have been willing to become a soldier," the young minister answered slowly. "But then I did not see the war as I see it now. I considered it a European war between powers who had long been unfriendly toward one another and who must fight out their differences to the bitter end. I believed Germany had started the war and I thought she was in the wrong, so I hoped and prayed she might be defeated. Then I think it would have gone hard with me as a clergyman to have been compelled to do the actual work of a soldier. Now I have learned what the great French writer says: 'The Germans are not fighting their enemies, they are fighting the human spirit.' As the enemy of the human spirit *they* must be destroyed. I am convinced we are engaged in a world conflict in which

the forces of good and evil are arrayed against each other to fight on, I trust, until there shall be no doubt of the spiritual victory. In such a fight any man must be proud to bear arms. Gladly would I share a soldier's life except that I hoped to be of greater service in carrying on Christ's message to the men who are doing His work. But if you fellows think I can do His work better by bearing a rifle and fighting in the trenches I am willing to tackle the job. Perhaps I may have a chance to show you I am not hiding behind my profession."

The young clergyman had spoken with strong feeling; now his expression altered and he flushed a second time.

"Forgive my preaching a sermon without warning you beforehand so you need not have been present. Now I am sorry to leave without giving you a chance to reply, but I have an appointment with some one who wishes to talk to me."

The young clergyman then left the group of men, who watched his departure with a variety of expressions.

But before one of them had made a remark, a girl wearing a somewhat crumpled Red Cross uniform appeared in their midst. She entered the conversation in which she had no invitation to take part.

Janet first smiled upon the convalescent soldier who had been her patient and was her warm champion.

"I hope no one of you objects to my overhearing your conversation," she began. "I stopped to listen first because I was curious and then it did not seem fair that all of you should be arrayed against one man. I don't see why men are so unfair to ministers. You do not criticize physicians and nurses for trying to serve you in their way instead of fighting with you, so why should you criticize clergymen? I thought I had read of the great devotion of the army chaplains who work day and night in the hospitals and go out upon the fields of battle to pray with the dying. Then I have heard wonderful stories of the French Catholic priests. But perhaps I have been mistaken and nothing of the kind takes place; you men who have been in battle must know."

Janet's eyes were blue enough now, while her cheeks had the sudden vivid color which came when excitement illuminated their pallor. She did not consider that she was interested in the defense of the clergy and she did not care to defend Howard Courtnay personally, but she had a desire to see justice and fair play. Howard Courtnay was not a coward and would fight as valiantly as any other man. It *was* true that he hoped to be of greater service as an army chaplain than as a soldier. He had made an effort to be sent to France in the early days of the war and now his appointment on board a hospital ship had been the choice of the government.

But Janet's manner was nearly always pleasing and at present the group of soldiers appeared perfectly willing to continue the argument with her.

"Then you think a clergyman is a better man than a soldier, even in these fighting times?"

The boy who challenged Janet, she saw without revealing the fact, was going home because, having lost a leg, he could never be a fighter again.

Her voice was tender as she replied.

"I do not think I wish to compare human beings these days so much as I wish to honor most of them. But always I want to see fair play. Isn't that what all this great war is about, to teach the world to play fair, so that the strong shall not impose their will upon the weak, simply because they are the strong?"

It was one of Janet Perry's many wisdoms in talking to masculine persons to present her ideas in the form of questions.

"Look here, Miss Perry, what about fair play? Why are you jumping on a lot of fellows who are already down? We only started in to have a bit of fun with our new chaplain. He looked like a lady's man and too good for most of us; besides he is altogether too handsome. However, I think he made a pretty good case for himself. Now won't you allow me to introduce my friends here? They have not had my good luck to have you for a nurse aboard ship."

It was Janet's soldier champion who spoke, so that the subject of the conversa-

tion changed, while the soldiers whom she had not met before were introduced to her.

Later, in her own tiny quarters shared with several other Red Cross nurses, Janet suffered the remorse of impulsive persons.

Why had she made herself conspicuous by entering a conversation in which she had no place? How annoyed Howard Courtney would be should he learn of it, when they had agreed to behave as if they had no past friendship? Was it possible that any one of the group of soldiers might believe she had a personal interest which would explain her intrusion?

CHAPTER X

The Ship's Concert

IT may seem difficult to realize, nevertheless the travelers on board the hospital ship *Consolation*, returning from France to the United States with three hundred wounded American soldiers, had seen but little of one another during the early part of the voyage.

The reasons for this were fairly obvious. The ship's crew and the hospital staff were too deeply engaged with their work, and many of the soldiers were too ill to leave their wards and so could only share the companionship of their own nurses and physicians and the men in the wards with them. The convalescent soldiers, who were able to be out on deck, were the exception, spending many hours in one another's society and making acquaintances among the crew and the Medical and Hospital Corps.

Notwithstanding, there were several persons on the *Consolation* whose business it was to come in contact with as many of the soldiers and the ship's personnel as possible. One of them was the ship's chaplain, the Rev. Howard Courtney; another was Carlo Navara, who held no such recognized position. Indeed, he represented an innovation, and yet was a surprising success. As a matter of fact, there was no more popular or useful person aboard.

If Carlo had entered the hospital service with the declared intention of using his music for the healing and the amusement of the wounded, he was discovering that he possessed other talents and uses.

There was no duty, no favor, he was not willing to undertake. If it were necessary and the hospital assistants were rushed or overburdened, he carried trays of food back and forth from the dining-room to the invalids, or performed any errand. Always gay and agreeable, he had none of the self-consciousness more often characteristic of Anglo-Saxons than of Latin peoples. In spite of insisting that he was an American,

Carlo possessed many of the traits of his Italian ancestry beside his inheritance of their musical nature.

Nevertheless, it was not his wonderful voice which first endeared him to the soldiers on board the *Consolation* and to the men and women who had undertaken the care of the wounded. The larger number of them were unaware of his distinguished talent and no one save his friends knew he had turned his back upon both fame and fortune to do the many small services which now occupied his hours.

In the beginning the soldiers liked him because he also had been a fighter and, having been wounded, was now recovered, a good omen for their own futures.

Not by his own account, but through accidental questioning, his new acquaintances also learned that he had volunteered to fight for Italy before the United States entered the war. This was not because he had any aptitude for a soldier's life, but because of his conviction that he owed his loyalty to the land of his birth, for Carlo was born in Italy, although emigrating to

New York when a tiny boy and now a naturalized American.

In exchanging stories, Carlo and the wounded American soldiers confided to one another the blue funk each one had endured on entering his first battle.

Then, by and by, in the most natural fashion, Carlo was able to make use of his gift.

Entering a ward one afternoon where the men were suffering from shell shock, to bring a message from a physician, he observed that Louise Roberts was having a difficult time with one of her patients.

The man was insisting upon getting out of bed when he was really too weak to walk, and, although Louise was employing all her authority and strength, she found it well nigh impossible to prevent him.

Carlo stood by the bedside of Louise's patient for a moment. Seeing the man throw himself out of her grasp, he laid his hands gently upon him.

"See here, old fellow," he remonstrated in the musical voice which was as evident in his speaking as his singing, "tell me

what it is you are after and let me get it for you. You are not up to much these days and had best be quiet."

Almost in the same instant the man showed less excitement, Louise never having had the wisdom to speak to him in this friendly and sensible fashion.

"I want to go home and I want my mother," he answered distinctly.

Without realizing that he might be breaking hospital ship rule, Carlo at once knelt on the floor beside the soldier's berth.

"First-class wishes, old man, and you are going to have both of them granted as soon as we can get you to the United States. Maybe you are a little mixed, so many things have been happening to you recently! Have you forgotten you are on your way home now on the good ship *Consolation*?"

For several hours the soldier had seemed delirious, or whatever the condition that comes as a result of shell shock, but at Carlo's questioning he appeared almost normal.

Of his own accord, taking tight hold of

Carlo's hand, he held it as if it afforded him the strength and sympathy he required.

"I'm from down south," he drawled, "from New Orleans. If I could sleep I believe I would dream I was home again and that I was going to be a well man once more and——"

Without allowing him to complete his sentence, fearing the sick man might speak of the sights and sounds, the memories which tortured him, Carlo interrupted.

"If you don't mind, Miss Roberts, will you let me see if I can make this fellow sleep? Do rest a little and give me a chance. If I worry the other men and nurses you will tell me?"

Kneeling on the floor, as unaffectedly as if he had been a child, Carlo began to sing low crooning songs, southern melodies, little Italian airs his mother had sung to her bambino, and which, with his wonderful musical memory, the young artist had never forgotten.

He sang softly as possible, trusting he would annoy no one else, and in fact no one would have been obliged to listen. But

after a tune the ward grew quiet and other restless men became comforted.

Nona Davis and Janet made no effort to control a few restful tears.

Louise Roberts, who had seated herself upon a small stool at the head of her patient's bed, marveled at Carlo's skill and gift.

So far what a poor success as a nurse she had been in her hospital ship work! Perhaps she was to learn the value of what John Mallory had always insisted was the failure in her nature—her lack of sympathy and understanding of temperaments unlike her own.

How annoying it had been to leave home without another farewell to her old friend. Moreover, Louise had disliked going away without knowing how seriously John Mallory had been injured through his rescue of the little Red Cross girl on the night of the fire at the Red Cross headquarters.

Early the following morning she and Janet had walked over to the Mallory farm to make inquiries, only to be told

that John Mallory, having been burned about the arms and face, had gone at once to a New York City hospital for treatment. So Louise only had opportunity to write him a note expressing her own and Janet's admiration and regret. The *Consolation* sailed so soon after there was no time to receive a reply or to learn of the seriousness of the young man's injury.

At present, Louise had but a few moments for reflection, for soon her patient had fallen asleep and Carlo had slipped away. Afterwards other duties absorbed her.

As a result of this experience Carlo returned next day to the same ward to ask after his new acquaintance and was immediately invited to sing again. Then the news of his gift spread after the fashion of ship gossip and less desperately ill men demanded a share of the entertainment. So Carlo developed the habit of singing either to or with the soldiers for hours each day and in the evenings until their early bed-time.

By no means did he continue to sing lullabies, but every war song and college

song known in the United States, and the popular airs sung along Broadway for the past season. This was more of a sacrifice than many people can appreciate. Never had Carlo's masters allowed him to sing anything except classical music and then for only a limited number of hours a day, so that he might not injure his voice.

The wounded soldiers were told nothing of this, yet they would scarcely have been interested had the information been vouchsafed them. These were the days of personal sacrifice and there was no reason why the artist alone should be spared. The war had not spared other artists, Rupert Brooke and Alan Seegar, the young poets, gifted musicians and painters had fallen; only the sons of kings so far had escaped.

But Carlo was glad to be of service and only when a request was made for a particular song did he introduce any serious music to his audiences.

Weary of exchanging jokes and experiences with one another, by and by the convalescent soldiers also demanded their portion of the young singer's time.

It was Miss Blackstone, the chief nurse aboard the *Consolation*, who finally approached Carlo Navara, requesting him to take charge of a ship's concert so that a larger audience might enjoy his music.

If Miss Blackstone considered she had just cause for prejudice against Sonya Valesky, this prejudice did not extend to Carlo Navara. Woman like, the annoyance she had suffered from Carlo's expression of excitement over Sonya's sudden fainting attack had been transferred to Sonya rather than to the actually responsible person.

However, as Sonya and Carlo had not seen each other save for a short five minutes' conversation since Sonya's breakdown, Miss Blackstone's suspicion that there was a sentimental relation existing between them had subsided. In the first place, Carlo appeared too much a boy in comparison, and in the second her concern took a totally different direction.

The preparations for the concert gave Carlo intense pleasure. He was but a boy whose career was still in the making.

He loved his music for its own sake and to give pleasure to an audience of wounded American soldiers was more important in his eyes than the admiration of a great city crowd.

Moreover, always at the back of Carlo Navara's mind was the desire to please and to impress Sonya Valesky. The admiration and affection he had felt for her in the final days in Italy, an affection which he insisted was love, had never altered or abated. Sonya might protest that the difference in their ages made all thought of a romantic relation between them a travesty, yet Carlo cherished another opinion. It was only because Sonya insisted they could have no pleasure in each other's friendship if he disputed the question with her, that he had concluded to remain silent for a time. Sonya was obstinate. She declared that his attitude was purely sentimental. As soon as he learned to know charming girls near his own age he would forget his boyish infatuation and his genius would bring him into contact with many worth-while people.

So, intending to prove his devotion and to force Sonya to regard him with a less sisterly and friendly attitude, Carlo waited with a fair amount of patience. In the meantime he had many other interests, and in true Italian fashion made himself as agreeable as possible to many other women and younger girls.

As soon as Miss Blackstone offered her suggestion, Carlo decided that the ship's entertainment was not to be solely his effort. Already he had found that several of the convalescent soldiers had exceptionally good voices. One of them had been a vaudeville actor who would do a short monologue. Janet Perry played the piano extremely well and would act as his accompanist and also play alone. Then, of course, there would have to be speeches from the ship's officers.

There were only twenty-four hours of preparation before the concert was announced. At this time the *Consolation* was about midway across the Atlantic ocean, but there was no definite statement of the day she might be expected to arrive. She was

sailing more slowly than the ordinary ocean-going vessel and there were reasons why her course should be guarded with especial vigilance.

Previous to her purchase by the United States government, the *Consolation* had been a coastwise steamer plying between New York and southern ports.

To adapt her to hospital purposes many changes were necessary.

Besides the wards and rooms for medical and surgical requirements, inclined planes were arranged from deck to deck so that the wounded and dangerously ill could be moved with slight inconvenience. In the center of the ship there was a fairly large elevator.

The one room which could be used for the concert was the large dining-room which had been left comparatively unchanged. Fortunately, in the forward portion of this room there was an organ which originally had been built in the ship.

In this room the concert was to take place.

CHAPTER XI

Life in Miniature

IN order that there should be no interruption of the retiring hour for the invalids the concert would start at seven o'clock.

The day preceding there was an air of subdued excitement and gaiety on board, as this was the first effort toward any general amusement since the hour of sailing from France. Naturally, no one failed to appreciate the danger, faced every moment of the day and night, in crossing a sea overrun with German submarines without a convoy. There was no reason to suspect that Germany would alter her attitude and respect a United States hospital ship, when apparently she had made special efforts to sink the Red Cross ships of the other Allies. However, if there was a complete realization of their possible peril, there was never a word spoken concerning it.

On the night of the concert the dining-room was brilliant with the flags of the Allies. Many of them were borrowed from the soldiers, nearly all of whom were carrying home to their families small flags as souvenirs.

It was originally through Nona Davis' suggestion that an exhibition was made of the decorations of honor bestowed upon the wounded American officers and soldiers aboard for especial valor at the front.

After receiving a consent to her plan from the commanding officer and surgeon, Nona went personally among the men to proffer her request. A little to her surprise she found it necessary to employ all the tact she could summon and all her powers of persuasion to accomplish her purpose. At first no one would agree. A few of the men especially honored suggested that such an action would appear like boasting; others insisted, by way of excuse, that they feared the precious insignia might be lost.

But when Nona persevered, insisting that such a display argued not vanity but a just pride, there was a change in the point

of view. She also promised to see that the Crosses of Honor and Distinguished Service medals were locked in the ship's safe as soon as the concert was over.

So Nona had her way. She mounted the badges upon a white cushion she had made for the purpose. She also wrote a few lines explaining for what especial act of valor each presentation had been made.

It was not possible that she could interview every soldier who had been so honored, but Bianca and several other Red Cross nurses assisted her.

Then Nona requested Dr. Latham to read the stories aloud on the evening of the ship's entertainment. Among the three hundred wounded, fifteen of the officers and soldiers had received awards for unusual bravery.

As soon as the dining-room was cleared after an early dinner, every nurse and every well man on the *Consolation* who could be spared from other duties, devoted their energies to assisting the soldiers into the places which had been reserved for them.

Some of them had to be brought from their wards in wheeled chairs, others had to be supported until they reached their seats, some had to be led by the hand because of the bandages about their eyes or because of a more permanent darkness.

At length Nona Davis and Janet Perry managed to take their seats a little earlier than the other nurses among a group of their convalescent patients, eager as children for the concert to begin.

The two girls looked a little alike, save that Janet was smaller and had less regular features and a more vivid coloring. Her bright chestnut hair had more red and chestnut shades in it than Nona's pale yellow crown. She was without Nona Davis' poise and dignity and tonight for some reason seemed especially nervous.

As one of the three nurses had to remain in the ward with the soldiers who could not be present, Louise Roberts had voluntarily sacrificed herself, offering to give up the concert. If at first Nona and Janet had both demurred, nevertheless in the end they had accepted the sacrifice.

Watching the late comers, Nona now sat with folded hands, but Janet appeared absorbed in some uncomfortable train of thought, save when one of the soldiers spoke to her or required some simple act of service, when her attention was distracted. Then she was always eager to respond.

Sonya and Mildred Thornton had not come in, but Bianca had been entering every now and then leading some soldier and then disappearing, to return with another. Ever since sailing from France, Bianca had devoted the greater part of her time and attention to the men whose sight had been injured. They required assistance in moving about the boat, but otherwise many of them were not invalids, so that Bianca could be as useful to them as if she were a fully trained Red Cross nurse.

Several times it occurred to Nona during the evening that either she had done Bianca an injustice in her estimate of her character in the old days in Italy, or else Bianca had developed in a wonderful fashion under Sonya's influence. Perhaps it was not Sonya's influence, but the fact that

Bianca's nature, cold and selfish as it had seemed, was responding as so many hundreds of thousands of other selfish, and undeveloped natures have responded to the idealizing effects of this great war.

At length, when Sonya made her appearance, she whispered to Nona that Mildred Thornton would remain on duty. Then crossing the room she took a seat which Carlo Navara had arranged to have saved for her near the platform.

Sonya was entirely unconscious, and it may have been Nona's affection which inspired the idea, yet it seemed to her that Sonya was more conspicuously beautiful than she had seen her in a long time.

She had on her uniform, a simple white dress like all the other nurses' uniforms, but tonight, in honor of the concert, none of them wore a cap and Sonya's hair shone with a kind of silvery radiance above the deep blue of her eyes and the dark clear tones of her olive skin. Yet, as always, it was Sonya's air of distinction which made her more noticeable than other women. And this was largely due to the unusual circumstances of her life.

After Sonya had taken her place and Nona was able to study her face more intently, she thought that her friend appeared unhappy in spite of a brave effort to hide the fact. Nona was fairly sure she understood the cause. Not since her failure in the operating room had Sonya been able to regain her own self-respect. Before any suggestion could be made that she was inadequate to the task of assisting at operations, Sonya had requested that she be transferred to work of less responsibility. So far her request had been disregarded. She was also probably aware that there was an only partially concealed antagonism felt toward her by a number of the Red Cross nurses aboard the *Consolation*. This may have been due to a single personal influence, or to the fact that Sonya Valesky had been a Russian woman, admitted to naturalization without being required to live the usual length of time in the United States because of her wish to undertake Red Cross nursing. A few months before the Government of the United States had issued this new ruling in

order to accelerate the naturalization of foreign-born women for Red Cross service.

A few moments after Sonya's entrance, Miss Blackstone, the head nurse, took her seat about half a dozen chairs away. The two women were an interesting contrast. Miss Blackstone was handsome in a large, overpowering, middle-aged fashion; or if she were not handsome, she looked extremely capable. Her hair, which had always been somewhat colorless, was now lightly streaked with gray; she had a fine regular nose, a large mouth with thin, bright red lips, and dark eyes.

As Sonya made an effort to bow to her, Miss Blackstone either did not see her greeting, or else pretended not to observe it.

There were other reasons why Sonya was uncomfortable tonight beside those which Nona was able to guess.

Shortly before dinner she had received a short note from Carlo Navara, which had been annoying. She had not replied to the note, fearing she might influence Carlo's singing. However, sooner or later there must be an understanding between them

which might have an unpleasant sequence. Sonya particularly hated difficulties with the people for whom she cared. Her past had been so filled with broken friendships that she wished to hold close to the new affections which had developed since her exile from Russia.

She was thinking so deeply that she did not observe the officer who at this instant entered the large room, although conscious of the air of attention which greeted him and of the subdued murmur which ran through the assembly. Shortly after the commanding officer and surgeon, Dr. David Clark, took a chair beside her. There was no alternative save to greet him with the necessary respect due her superior; nevertheless, Sonya felt an inward regret that he had chosen to place himself near her.

She had not seen Dr. Clark since her failure to assist him in the operating room. She had passed him once or twice, when he had spoken to her with what appeared ordinary kindness. She scarcely knew whether he had paid sufficient attention to her to be aware of her breakdown, so

absorbed had he been by his work at the moment. After the delay, to apologize now would seem almost an impertinence.

So, Sonya after her first greeting, said nothing to the great man next her.

Dr. Clark was past forty, with a face more like a distinguished actor's than a physician's. He was one of the most famous surgeons in the United States, having given up one of the richest practices in New York to serve in his present position. And although Sonya knew nothing of his personal life, he had been a widower for a number of years.

"I trust you have entirely recovered, Miss Valesky," Dr. Clark said courteously a moment later. "You must not take your momentary breakdown too seriously. I understand you have not had so much experience in nursing as some of our other nurses. Do you know it has been a strange experience with me, after twenty years' practice of surgery that now and then I feel I have not the courage to go on with my work among these wonderful boys. I would not confess this fact to many people,

I suppose it is because they are so young, so gallant, that the best one can do to help is after all so little."

Until this speech Sonya had felt no personal sense of liking for the distinguished surgeon and officer beyond the respect she accorded his position and reputation. Now she looked at him with unconscious intentness. She was accustomed to the study of human character and knew that, in spite of the commonly accepted theory, one did not often find humility associated with greatness. Yet there was nothing in the expression of the face she contemplated to make her doubt his sincerity.

He turned from speaking to her to look at the audience of whom they formed a part.

Except for the limited number of Red Cross nurses and doctors and hospital attendants and a few of the ship's crew, the audience was, of course, composed of the wounded soldiers, as many as were able to be present.

Never before had Sonya seen so many of the men together at one time. Through a flash of quickly controlled tears she realized

that until tonight she had never beheld faces so spiritualized through suffering and through a high and deathless ideal. Not that the soldiers appeared unhappy; they seemed unusually gay and good humored.

At this instant there was a burst of applause, for Carlo had come quietly in, and they were fond of him, appreciating that he was doing all that he could for their pleasure.

"There is a poem I want you to read. I will send it to your state-room tonight if I may?" Dr. Clark added, speaking again to his companion. "Better than anything I have yet discovered, it explains to me why these boys have been called upon to endure so much, in the old, old sacrifice of youth to war."

Sonya was about to respond to the grave man beside her, who seemed in a serious mood for an evening's pleasure, when she noticed some one approaching them.

It was Miss Blackstone, who had risen from her place and was evidently intending to speak to the commanding surgeon.

"I don't wish to interrupt confidences,"

she began with an attempt at archness, which was absurd in a woman of her age and character, "but Dr. Clark, if you have concluded your conversation a seat has been reserved for you where you will be able to see and hear, perhaps, more comfortably than you can here. You know we must take good care of our commanding surgeon."

At Miss Blackstone's approach Dr. Clark had, of course, gotten up.

He bowed courteously, but showed no inclination to do as he was bidden.

"You are extremely kind," he protested, "but you realize I must not take advantage of my position to the extent of selfishness. Besides, if Miss Valesky will permit me to remain where I am I shall be more than comfortable."

Dr. Clark spoke with the courtesy any gentleman would have employed under the same circumstances. Nevertheless, Sonya regretted he had not complied with Miss Blackstone's request. There was an expression in Miss Blackstone's dark eyes and the sudden tightening of her thin lips which Sonya did not enjoy.

Personally she preferred not to be selected for marked attention by the commanding surgeon, neither did she wish to incur Miss Blackstone's dislike.

It was possible that Dr. Clark may have ordered that she be made one of the assistants in the operating room, which would give the chief nurse a reasonable right to annoyance. Yet Sonya could not fail to wonder if any greater intimacy had existed in the past between Dr. Clark and his head nurse than the one due to their long connection with the same hospital? If this were true, certainly she had no wish to become a reason for their estrangement.

At this moment Sonya wished that she might disregard the respect due her superior and ask Dr. Clark to sit somewhere else.

However, at present the concert was about to begin.

Sonya glanced toward the platform to observe that Carlo Navara was now facing the audience. For an instant his glance swept hers and included Dr. Clark. Then to her intense annoyance she felt herself flushing warmly. Possibly Carlo's glance

would have signified nothing to any one else, but Sonya understood its meaning.

Oftentimes, at the opening of one of his concerts, when she chanced to be present, before beginning his program he looked toward her, as if asking her encouragement and inspiration. And Sonya had always responded with all the fervor and ardor she was capable of giving forth. But tonight Carlo had not waited for her returning smile. She had seen his eyes at once grow sullen and his full boyish lips twitch angrily before he bowed to his audience.

As a matter of fact, Sonya wanted to shake Carlo for his behavior; this would have been some vent for the irritation the past few moments had caused her.

But Janet Perry had now gone forward to seat herself at the organ, and in another moment Carlo's lovely voice arose, leading in the singing of "America."

CHAPTER XII

The Supreme Gift

THE concert was nearly over when Nona Davis noticed Bianca rise and slip quietly out of the room.

Ten minutes later she came back, but not alone. Her arm was inside a young United States officer's and she was guiding him toward a chair which had been empty and awaiting him.

The officer was a captain; one recognized this by his uniform, but Nona was a little surprised on realizing that she had never observed him since the sailing of the *Consolation*. Yet this was not so remarkable, as there were many of the soldiers aboard whom she had not seen. Through her effort to discover the heroes, who had received special marks of distinction for valor, she had largely increased her acquaintance; nevertheless, Bianca and a number of the Red Cross nurses had aided

her efforts and apparently this young officer was an especial friend of Bianca's. It seemed to Nona, even at a distance, that Bianca treated him with exceptional tenderness, almost with reverence.

The young officer was evidently blind, although he wore no bandage over his eyes and Nona could not see with sufficient distinctness to recognize whether his eyes were entirely sightless. He moved with slow and careful hesitancy, the air of pained embarrassment which revealed his affliction unmistakably.

Nona realized that Bianca had probably had great difficulty in persuading him to share in the pleasure of the ship's concert and that his had been a last-minute consent. It was possible that at all times he was reluctant to appear among his soldier companions until he had fought and been victorious in the final battle with his own sorrow and loss.

Even though he was unable to return her gaze or be conscious of it, Nona did not feel that she had the right to continue to stare at the officer too steadfastly.

Among the large audience of officers and soldiers, for several reasons, he particularly attracted her attention, notwithstanding the fact that she was not sufficiently near to receive more than an indistinct impression.

When he had originally entered the room with Bianca she had observed that his tall, well-built figure was slightly stooped and that his dark hair was threaded with white. This made her the more curious, since in spite of these attributes he did not seem an elderly man.

Then Carlo Navara started to sing again and Nona's attention was distracted. One could scarcely listen to Carlo's voice without surrendering both one's thoughts and one's emotions to the magic of his music.

At the present time he was singing whatever modern song the soldiers in the audience requested.

"Joan of Arc" was the latest choice and although one of the earlier of the war songs, with Nona it had remained an especial favorite.

“Joan of Arc, Joan of Arc,
Do your eyes from the skies, see the foe?
Can't you see the drooping Fleur de lis?
Can't you hear the tears of Normandy?
Joan of Arc, Joan of Arc,
Let your spirit guide us through;
Come lead your France to victory,
Joan of Arc, they are calling you.”

As Carlo's voice soared on, in a mental picture, Nona's mind wandered to the American hospital she had just left behind in the fields of Normandy. She thought of Eugenia and of Captain Castaigne and of the little French Jeanne who had befriended him. Then there was the first troop of United States soldiers who had been quartered in the village nearby, they had called the little girl their mascot, the new Jeanne d'Arc.

Of late what a swiftly moving panorama life had become for the larger part of the world! How many new divisions of American troops had passed in and out of this same little French village in the last year! One made friends and the months went by and often there was no word of what had befallen them.

Lieutenant Hugh Kelley and Captain John Martin, their especial friends for the first few months after their arrival at the American hospital in Normandy, had both vanished. Yet if ever there was a chance, Nona intended to inquire what had become of Captain Martin from some friend who had known them both in South Carolina. She did not wish to think of him as unfaithful to their friendship if it were no longer possible for him to write her.

Carlo's singing had ended for a time. Now there was a new spell of emotional excitement throughout the large room.

Dr. Latham had lumbered up on the little platform and stood looking over the assemblage. He was about to read aloud the names of the men who had been decorated for special acts of heroism.

Several of the soldiers, at no great distance from Nona Davis, at this moment made furtive efforts to leave their places. One could readily guess they were among the soldiers who had been honored. However, their companions held them firmly in their seats.

The big doctor's voice grew husky as he read one gallant story after the other. Now and then he was forced to clear his throat and once or twice he removed his spectacles.

At the close of each recital there were cheers and applause from the audience. Two or three of the soldiers so distinguished were able to bow their appreciation, others were too confused. Among the number, half were too ill to be present.

Dr. Latham had announced that from the list of three hundred wounded American soldiers aboard the *Consolation*, fifteen of them had received special citations and medals for acts of courage under fire.

He had just concluded reading the account of the fourteenth man upon his record, when, after the applause had died away, he thrust his notes into his pocket.

"I think I prefer to tell you why Captain John Martin has been decorated both by the French Government and the British, and on his return to the United States is to receive the highest medal for distinguished service in the gift of his own country.

"I take the liberty of speaking to you in my own words because Captain Martin is an especial friend of mine, although I have made his acquaintance since sailing from France. I learned of his action not through any words of his, the account was confided to me in the interval we remained in the French country. His valor has thrilled at least three nations in these days when gallantry has grown to be almost a common thing.

"Those of us aboard this ship know how many times in the past few months the Allied line in France has been held as if by a miracle. There have been long hours when our soldiers have been outnumbered in certain places ten to one. But I know of no other case when the German horde has been kept in check by two men, an officer and a private, and then for a little time by one man alone. The officer I speak of is Captain John Martin. His company of artillery was stationed in a little section of Belleau Wood, his big guns hidden by a thick clump of trees. A mistake was made by the higher com-

mand and a number of his men were cut off from the others. Against the few that were left the enemy directed a particularly heavy fire. One by one the gunners died at their posts, Captain Martin's second lieutenant being killed by his side and his first lieutenant in charge of the soldiers, who were separated from their company.

"By and by Captain Martin had but one gunner remaining, yet this man was an expert, forcing his big gun to do the work of half a dozen, his captain beside him directing his fire and helping him to load. The gunner was killed. Captain Martin took his place so that the firing never ceased. He kept a place in the woods clear. The American soldiers rushed into this space and Captain Martin was relieved. Later, his own soldiers came back to their command, but Captain Martin was found to be blind and had been blind for several moments from an explosion of powder, yet his mind had worked on and his hands had automatically obeyed. Captain Martin says he was not completely blinded until after relief came; the darkness about him

he had thought the smoke from the guns. He does not feel that his action was remarkable, but herein he differs from the United States, from France and Great Britain. Later on in the course of that same day the American soldiers captured the whole of Belleau Wood, as you know. At present Captain Martin is returning home with us."

As he concluded his speech, Dr. Latham looked over toward the place where Bianca sat by the side of the blind officer.

Save for an instant it was not possible to see them, for instinctively every member of the little assembly to whom the action was possible had sprung to his feet.

Then, as if from one throat, came a prolonged cheer.

In the same instant Nona Davis left her seat. Always subconsciously she must have known who the officer was who had come into the room with Bianca. Else why should the image of the early hospital days in Normandy and their first friends among the American soldiers so suddenly and vividly appear before her? Until their entrance there had been no such thought in her mind.

Without difficulty Nona found herself beside Bianca.

"Bianca, will you be good enough to change places with me? I know Captain Martin, and I wish to speak to him."

The young girl moved away; the audience continued cheering.

Nona placed her hand inside Captain Martin's, without a word aiding him to arise.

For a moment he stood bowing stiffly, his expression stern and sorrowful. Apparently he did not enjoy the applause which the story of his heroism had called forth. Even in the midst of disaster his was essentially the military face and figure. The face was clean shaven, the nose strong and aquiline and the mouth deeply cut. At present the gray eyes were a little sunken and their color dimmed.

As soon as possible he seated himself again.

Taking her place beside him, Nona laid her hand lightly upon the young officer's for a second time.

"Captain Martin, have you forgotten

me, Nona Davis? Do you remember I nursed you for a little while in the American hospital in Normandy? I continued working there until the sailing of the *Consolation* and then I was transferred to the hospital ship. It is stupid to speak of the strangeness of circumstances these days, and yet it does seem curious for us to meet again in this fashion. I am very glad."

For the first time Captain Martin smiled, a slow smile.

"Forgive my not appearing so surprised as you, Miss Nona," he answered, employing the old-fashioned Southern use of the first name, which Nona understood. "But I was aware of your presence on board a day or so after our sailing. Your little half-American, half-Italian friend was trying to entertain me with the ship news and mentioned your name among the Red Cross nurses. I did not believe she could mean any one save you, yet I confess I questioned her until I learned there could be no mistake."

"And afterwards you made no effort to see me," Nona returned. "It seems to me

you have been unkind. We were friends not so long ago that you could have entirely forgotten me. I can understand your soldier's life was too busy a one to find time to write, but you might have talked to me a little on board. Still, I must not reproach you," and Nona tried to laugh naturally, in spite of the fact that the man beside her looked ten years older than the young officer she had nursed less than a year before.

"Oh, I could have found sufficient time to write you; it was not for that reason I ceased writing," he replied. "You understand that for the past few months I have been in a hospital. I would not return to the United States until I was convinced I could never fight again. I presume I will be less of a nuisance there than in France, though a good deal of trouble to some one wherever I am until I have become more accustomed to the darkness.

"Still you must not believe, Miss Nona, I did not look forward to the pleasure of having a talk with you before our landing. I confess I was waiting for the courage. In

the face of what other men are enduring it is cowardly of me to dread the sympathy of my friends and I knew you would sympathize with me deeply."

There was a simplicity and a dignity in the man beside her which affected Nona with an emotion too deep for tears. She saw in his place the gallant, overbearing young officer of the year before, with his strict, almost boyish ideas of discipline and his impatience under slight suffering. He had vanished. His youth, his sight, more than his life, had been his supreme gift to the world. Yet had he not kept that little space in the Belleau Wood free of the enemy for an hour? Then who could say that his sacrifice had been in vain?

"Won't you come out on deck with me, now, tonight?" Captain Martin asked. "Is there a better time than this for our talk, when you are less busy than in the day? I don't wish to be selfish if you prefer staying here. But if so will you ask Bianca to take me back to my quarters. It is stupid of me, yet I have not grown accustomed to the sensation of a number of

persons about me. I become confused by the feeling of their nearness. With one or two I am more at my ease."

"I should like nothing better than to go on deck with you," Nona answered instantly. "You must not feel you are depriving me of any entertainment. The Rev. Howard Courtnay, the ship's chaplain, is about to make a speech. I have an idea he will not be amusing; he seems an uncommonly serious-minded person."

Nona was talking lightly to conceal the depth of her feeling.

She was forced to place her arm about the shoulders of her companion to show him that he must turn in order to move in the direction of the open door.

Out on deck, except for the men on watch, the way was clear. Nona's arm resting gently inside Captain Martin's, he was able to walk without especial guidance.

The July night was clear and serene; little winds from the sea with their salt spray were like soft fingers tapping on one's cheeks.

"How fine this is! I mean to live by

the sea, after I have learned some trade which will make me at least half a useful man again!" Captain Martin exclaimed, speaking and looking much more vigorous and buoyant than he had in the crowded room below. "The wind has a thousand voices and fragrances. Strange that I should only have learned this of late!"

Then Captain Martin laughed and his manner and voice were like the young lieutenant Nona had originally known.

"Remember a walk I took beside you one day, Miss Nona, when that newspaper fellow, Dawson, was at your other side and you were heartily anxious to get rid of us both? I was determined you should be protected at all costs, though from what, I have never been sure. Perhaps I resented the old adage, 'the pen is mightier than the sword.' Still, I had sense enough to know when the pen had conquered."

Not knowing how to reply to this speech, Nona was annoyed by it.

"The pen is not winning this war, do you think?" she answered. "Still, perhaps a few of the newspaper correspondents

are under this impression? I do not know what Mr. Dawson has been doing in the past year, I have had no word from him. But tell me where do you mean to go when we arrive in the United States?"

Nona remembered that even as a little boy, in the old days in South Carolina, Jack Martin, as she had known him then, had no relatives.

"Oh, I shall stay on in New York for a time and see as many of the great oculists as I can discover. You know I am a soldier and don't mean to surrender, not even at the last ditch. Still, I confess the French fellows and the one big American specialist who was able to see me did not give me much hope. But come, I am weary of talking of myself. Let us speak of you. Are you not going home to rest? You have been nursing pretty steadily ever since this old war began, haven't you? Let me see, did it commence a thousand years ago?"

The next half hour the girl and officer continued to walk up and down the deck uninterrupted by any one else. They had a

delightful talk, and now and then for a moment Nona completely forgot the tragedy of her companion's loss. Several times they laughed gayly over reminiscences of his unreasonableness as a patient, when Nona had been the only nurse he would permit to care for him. Never in those days had Lieutenant Jack Martin been able to talk as this man did! Some wonderful spiritual transformation had taken place in him. Nona had always believed in his unusual courage as a soldier, but had she believed in the valor of his greater renunciation?

When at length they had said good-night and Nona was in her tiny state-room, suddenly her own courage vanished. Jack Martin had been such a brilliant officer and had cared so supremely for his soldier's career. His country and the world had need of the services that now he could never render.

Against bitterness and resentment, the greatest foes of the human heart, Nona was fighting the fight that so many, many other human beings are facing today.

She had not conquered when there came a little knock at her door and a messenger brought her a note from Sonya Valesky.

"Read this poem, Nona dear, before you go to bed. Dr. David Clark has just sent it to me. After the stories we have listened to tonight, perhaps it may help you as it has me—to understand.

"SONYA."

And Nona read the poem by Margaret Steele Anderson:

"BREAKING."

(The Lord God Speaks to a Youth)

"Bend now thy body to the common weight!
(But oh, that vine-clad head, those limbs of morn!
Those proud young shoulders I myself made straight!
How shall ye wear the yoke that must be worn?)

Look thou, my son, what wisdom comes to thee!
(But oh, that singing mouth, those radiant eyes!
Those dancing feet—that I myself made free!
How shall I sadden them to make them wise?)

Nay then, thou shalt! Resist not, have a care!
(Yea, I must work my plans who sovereign sit!
Yet do not tremble so! I cannot bear—
Though I am God!—to see thee so submit!)

CHAPTER XIII

Janet's Surprise

WHEN Nona Davis left the concert room with Captain Martin, Janet Perry, who had been sitting beside her save when she was taking part in the performance, would gladly have accompanied her.

As a matter of fact, she also dreaded the Rev. Howard Courtnay's speech, having an absolute conviction that it would not prove a success.

Moreover, the audience was growing weary; Dr. Latham's address having aroused them to a pitch of emotional excitement, the inevitable reaction was following.

As the large majority of the men present were ill, the evening had already represented a good deal of strain. Now they could scarcely be expected to be in the mood for listening to a sermon upon their

duties and responsibilities' and the proper degree of patience they should display under affliction.

It was Janet Perry's impression that she could guess almost in detail what would be said. She had listened many times to other sermons of the same character, which might represent what the average congregation required for spiritual food and inspiration, yet somehow Janet did not feel that would meet the need of this particular group of soldiers.

In truth they had faced their responsibilities. Now their patience under suffering was a daily marvel to the men and women who had the opportunity for serving them.

One could hardly see how any human being who had not been through the fire could dare preach to the men who had. Yet Janet appreciated that it was probably because she was a woman that she felt able to offer only her admiration, sympathy and aid. Men of recognized ability must feel and act differently and become leaders of other men. In times past no one had

disputed Howard Courtnay's ability or his unquestionable gifts and character. In all probability her own sensitiveness made her believe that she observed expressions of amusement or of antagonism upon the faces surrounding her.

Notwithstanding, as the speaker took his place on the platform, she could not help being glad that he made so fine an appearance. In his chaplain's uniform there was no man with a more soldierly bearing.

"I know you are tired, yet I wish to tell you just one story if you are willing to listen," the young clergyman began in a voice and manner which even the most prejudiced critic, as Janet was prepared to be, could not consider anything save friendly and agreeable. "Afterwards, if there is time I have another line of stories. The first I heard before I sailed, but it was told me by a man who had come back from No Man's Land. This fellow was a 'long-shoreman before he became a soldier. He had lived the usual life, drank and swore when it suited him, had been knocked

about when he was a kid and was none too careful about knocking others about after he had come to a man's strength. Well, he went with his regiment to France less than a year ago, was wounded and shipped home again. I made his acquaintance in a hospital in Philadelphia.

"After a time he was well enough to go about a little and one day he rode down to the river front to see his companions. At first they made a lot of fuss over him, but afterwards they had to go on with their work, so he sat down in the sunshine to watch them. The look of the river and of his old friends, the sights and the smells of the city behind him, were home. They were to him what another place is soon to be to you. As a result he fell to dreaming.

"He could not help thinking of the contrast in the lives of the men who stay at home and of those who go over to what for want of a better name we call, the 'front.'

"Suddenly overhearing one of his old friends start cursing a younger man, whom he had already knocked down, the soldier came out of his reverie and, getting up,

walked over to the man, laying his hand upon his shoulder. He had but one hand, as he had lost the other arm.

"Not seeing who it was, the man shook him off with a string of worse oaths.

" 'Stop that,' the soldier commanded. 'See here, fellows, I used to be as good as you are at swearing. Now, never so long as I live am I going to take God's name in vain, or stand by quiet and hear another man do it. I tell you out there in No Man's Land, with nothing between you and the hereafter that is worth counting, a man finds God. I found Him; now I ain't saying what He is like and I don't intend to try, but He ain't got nothing to do with cursing or bullying or not playing square.'

"Then the soldier went back and sat down again in the sunshine and for a time at least the other men quit swearing.

"So somehow tonight, I do not feel as if I dared preach to the men who have been out there in No Man's Land where God is with every man fighting for the right whether you ask His aid or not. Sometimes I think maybe No Man's Land is really God's country.

"I have finished with this serious story; now I want to tell you another kind. I have been collecting war stories to illustrate every one of our sixty-three nationalities of good United States citizens.

"Do you know this Jew story? One man asked another, whose son had gone to the war, if the son had received a commission. 'No, he gets a salary.' "

After this there was a darky story and many others, some good, some bad and some indifferent, as a collection of funny stories is apt to be.

Yet the audience behaved as if thoroughly pleased.

Now and then when the speaker suggested it was time he should cease, there were repeated calls from the floor that he continue.

Janet was amazed. She had known for years that the Rev. Howard Courtnay was considered an unusually gifted orator and preacher; still, she had never dreamed he was a good story teller. Yet here he was able to change from one dialect to another, as if he were a talented character impersonator.

At length, Dr. David Clark, the commanding officer, made a few remarks and ended by requesting a benediction. So, in response, the chaplain closed the entertainment.

Afterwards, when the invalids were being assisted to their quarters, Janet Perry managed to speak to her former friend for a moment alone.

Going up to him she laid her hand gently upon his arm, and no one could be more gentle than Janet when the mood was upon her.

"Howard, I want to congratulate you on your talk to the soldiers tonight. I confess I was not sure you would be a success. But they enjoyed all you said and I am sure I did."

Janet's eyes appeared a deep and at the same time brilliant blue, colorful as the dark blue flower of the delphinium. Under the electric lights, her chestnut hair showed its lights and shadows, so that for the moment the girl had the sudden vivid beauty which comes in swift flashes to persons of ardent temperaments.

"You must forgive me many things, Howard," she added. "I am sorry I was so foolish as to suggest that you had been made chaplain of the *Consolation* in order to be near me; I was too much excited at seeing you so unexpectedly. You must not continue to be annoyed with me. Somehow, I feel as if I could not bear to be unfriendly with any human being in the world these days."

If the close of her little speech was less satisfactory than its opening, it was also characteristic of Janet Perry. One could never guess what swift changes her mind would take, yet always if one were patient. one could rely on her sweetness.

In the weeks of their separation Howard Courtnay had realized this fact.

Janet had not deliberately intended to deceive him by assuring him that she cared for him and then a few months later that she had changed her opinion. The truth was she had yielded to the mood of each moment. She could not understand how greatly her change of attitude had hurt the man beside her. Janet believed she was

being truthful in stating to her cousin that she and Howard Courtney had been only childhood friends until a few months before, having no idea that the young clergyman had loved her since she was the small wilful child he had been sent to search for and bring home in safety.

"You are kind, Janet, and I have nothing to forgive. I was stupid to reproach you, as if one could command love. I am glad you think I made a success of my little effort at a talk tonight. You were justified in thinking I might not; for I appreciate I am not first class as a ship's chaplain. Yet the soldiers are teaching me so much that in time they may come to like me for what they can do *for me* if not for what I can do for them. You cannot realize how hard it is, Janet, for a minister to know other men as he would like to know them. Some fellows have the gift, but I have not had it. It will make it easier for me if you will continue my friend. From all I hear you are succeeding in your work where I fail.

At this Janet shook her head energetically.

"Don't be absurd. Good-night."

Then, because the spirit of mockery so often played upon the surface of her nature, the girl added mockingly:

“The Rev. Howard Courtnay, who speaks of acquiring information from me, is not a friend but a stranger.”

In order to soften her words she put out her hand.

“Let us have another talk, if there is a chance, Howard. Now we must both make ourselves useful. But tonight, before you go to sleep, say the beautiful prayer for those in peril on the sea.”

CHAPTER XIV

The Sinking

THREE days later, one morning in the early dawn, a tremendous shock was felt aboard the *Consolation*. At the same instant every man and woman aboard awoke to the realization of what had occurred. Then the ship settled and began slowly to list to starboard.

The *Consolation* had been torpedoed. No submarine was to be seen. The under-sea pirate had struck and slunk away. Immediately the pre-arranged signal of disaster was sounded.

In their ward at the moment, Louise Roberts and Nona Davis chanced to be on watch while Janet was asleep. At the time the nurses and attendants were about equally divided between the number who were at work and the remainder who were enjoying their hours of relief.

Yet there was extraordinarily little excite-

ment. Not only had the catastrophe long been feared, by many persons aboard the *Consolation* it had been confidently expected. Instantly an S O S call for help was sent out by the wireless officer on duty.

To meet just such a situation every preparation had been made and every possible command given to the crew and the medical and hospital staffs. There had been several drills since the day of sailing, in which the patients who could be disturbed had taken part.

Tragedy beyond one's imagination accompanies the sinking of an ordinary passenger ship. One would scarcely like to know every detail of what must transpire upon a torpedoed vessel filled with the wounded, the ill and oftentimes the dying.

Upon the signal of alarm Nona and Louise, with the assistance of two male nurses, began adjusting the life belts about their patients. Every human being aboard had been given a number to correspond with the number of his place in a lifeboat. On the wall in each ward hung a chart with the necessary printed directions.

A moment later, other hospital attendants appeared at open doors bearing stretchers, so that the soldiers too ill to walk could be lifted upon them and borne away.

In a miraculously short time Janet Perry entered her ward to assist the other nurses. She seemed entirely self-possessed; indeed, among the three Red Cross girls Louise Roberts alone revealed unmistakable nervousness and loss of control.

Once Janet had an opportunity to whisper so that no one could overhear:

"Don't be so frightened, Ouida dear. Remember how brave you have always been in the past and what John Mallory said of you!"

But in response Louise could only shake her head, not trusting herself to speak. Perhaps she had been brave in the past only because her courage had never really been tested. Now she must struggle not to think of herself.

For an instant Miss Blackstone glanced in upon the workers, giving a hurried order. She was cold, composed and thoroughly

efficient; although disliking her on Sonya's account, Nona Davis nevertheless felt a wave of admiration for her quiet ability.

It was the duty of the chief nurse to see that all commands to the women Red Cross nurses were being strictly obeyed, so that nothing must escape her vigilance. In certain of the other wards Miss Blackstone would find the effort to remove the soldiers accompanied by greater difficulties. In some of them the men were so seriously injured that the very act of removing them too hurriedly or too unskillfully might result in their deaths.

Among the shell-shock patients a few were able to walk after a little encouragement and assistance. There were others who had fainted at the first shock.

One of Nona's charges insisted that he could reach the deck and find his place beside the lifeboat if she would accompany him.

"Come then," said Nona, and linking the soldier's arm firmly through hers, she left the ward.

Walking was becoming hazardous since

the *Consolation* was listing more steadily toward the starboard. Without doubt she was sinking, and yet, perhaps, there would be time before she finally went down for the passengers and crew to be transferred to the lifeboats.

Nona was surprised by her own lack of personal fear. Yet she should have learned courage after four years' experience of war as a Red Cross nurse. What she was conscious of, as she made her way into the open air with her patient, was a keen anxiety for the safety of the wounded and something nearly amounting to panic for certain of her dearest friends aboard.

In the last few days she and Jack Martin had managed to meet for a few moments within each twenty-four hours. On an evening toward bed-time, when Nona was free, they had had another walk together in the starlit darkness. It was an idea with Captain Martin that he could move more freely in the darkness than in the daylight, and Nona had no desire to argue the question with him, realizing he was doing his best to meet his tragedy as courageously as

possible, and in his own way. She was merely anxious to learn to be of some slight aid.

In these few days Nona had discovered also that Jack Martin was not defeated and that he possessed the invincible spirit Germany is learning at last to recognize as unconquerable. Later on, when he had grown more accustomed to his loss of sight, somewhere in the world there was a mission awaiting a nature like his. Even if he could no longer command a company of soldiers, his gifts of mind and character would not be wasted.

So, at this moment of their common peril, Nona found herself more terrorized by the fear that Captain Martin might be among the lost than that she herself might perish. It was incredible that they should all be saved, and *he* was blind. Moreover, if there should be an instant of decision between his rescue and the rescue of some other human being, Captain Martin's choice unhesitatingly would be made. He had no such faith in his own future as Nona held for him. Also Nona appreciated that

his affliction would never be allowed to count with him; in any case his soldier's ideal would triumph.

"If only it were her present duty to see him safely into his place aboard their lifeboat!" Yet even as Nona worried she was glad to remember that their lifeboat was the same and that they would be seated within a few feet of each other. They had made this important discovery one afternoon during a ship's drill; earlier in the voyage Captain Martin had made no effort to take part.

By this time Nona had managed to make her way out on the upper deck, still guiding and encouraging her soldier, until he stood in position near his lifeboat. Then she sought her own.

Nona had been given the order not to go below again but to await her call. So she stood watching the amazing scene. There was extraordinarily little confusion or excitement as the lifeboats were being swung out on their davits and the wounded placed aboard.

Yet, as she searched, hoping to catch

sight of Sonya Valesky, Nona had no glimpse of her. Therefore she must be upon the lower side of the ship.

Several yards away Bianca stood, pale and still, yet apparently self-possessed. Next her was Carlo Navara, who seemed nervous and troubled. Nona realized that he was worrying over Sonya. Once he made a movement as if intending to go to seek her, but laying her hand upon his arm, Bianca either pleaded or else commanded him to continue in his place. They had been ordered to remain near their lifeboats until the wounded were aboard and this was not the moment for disobedience.

Not far from Bianca, Louise Roberts had dropped upon her knees, as if unable to stand. Her face showed complete terror, although it was almost impossible to associate Louise's usual calmness and self-control with her present collapse.

However, in the past four years of war, Nona had witnessed too many strange paradoxes in human nature to be puzzled by any sudden change of character.

Janet Perry, unconscious whether she

was obeying or disobeying orders, had remained continuously at work. She was standing near one of the ship's corridors through which the wounded were being carried. If one of the soldiers groaned with the pain of being moved, Janet's lips would twitch in sympathy, yet always she spoke some word of encouragement.

There was no look of the butterfly now in the girl's haggard face with its shining blue eyes.

Suddenly discovering her cousin's condition, she moved quickly and unobtrusively toward her.

Nona then saw Louise clutch at Janet's skirts, murmuring some despairing sentence. In another instant Janet disappeared.

At this moment Nona's attention was directed toward the lifeboat which she was soon to enter. It swung upon its davits above the water, now holding nearly its quota of the wounded. Jack Martin was being helped aboard by one of the seamen.

It may have been Nona's imagination, and yet she felt as if his blind eyes were

seeking her out, as if his whole face reflected his reluctance at being forced to take precedence of her.

Almost at the same instant Nona's own number was cried.

A moment later from her place in the lifeboat she looked out over the water.

There was still no sign of a U-boat, and she wondered vaguely if another torpedo would be fired to complete the destruction of the hospital ship. Yet this would not be necessary. Already the *Consolation* was going down. There was now only the question of time before her final disappearance.

As her lifeboat was lowered, Nona saw that the waves were not high, but there were little cross currents of wind which made them dangerously choppy. She had her moment of terror as the boat struck the water, plunged forward and listed upon the side where she was seated. Even at the same instant the thought that Captain Martin was so close beside her gave her a sense of strength and assurance. The lifeboat righted itself, then the sailors at the

oars pulled sharply away from the *Consolation*.

By this time the dawn was breaking and the first haze of the early morning disappearing in light streaks of color.

As she gazed toward the hospital ship, which was now fast disappearing, Nona forgot everything else. The vessel was sinking by the stern, and her prow reared itself out of the water, as if it were some noble head offering its last gallant challenge to the world. Nearly all of the lifeboats had pulled away. In the center, above the decks of the *Consolation*, Nona could still see the Red Cross.

A few figures remained on the sloping deck which was lifted far above the water line.

"Sonya!" Nona called under her breath, recognizing the futility of her own act and yet at the same time appreciating that Sonya was the one friend whom she had failed to see since the torpedoing of their ship.

Her eyes fell on Captain Wells, who was holding on to a stanchion and calmly

viewing the departure of the boats. In ordinary times he was a small stout man, with too conspicuous an air of self importance. Yet since the moment of tragedy his manner and appearance had seemed almost majestic to the many pairs of eyes which had been directed toward him.

Even now there was a solitariness about his attitude to appeal to one's imagination, in spite of the fact that only a few feet away were his first officer and the ship's chaplain.

Captain Wells had been a member of the United States Navy for almost a quarter of a century, having in recent years commanded several large vessels. The supreme pride of his life rested in the fact that he had been chosen to guard the destiny of the first United States hospital ship.

Many times in the past three weeks he had sworn to himself to bring her safe to port, whatever the German menace. Well, he had done his best and failed; like many another man in a like position, if his life were to be the forfeit, he considered it of little value.

These impressions were in a measure communicated to Nona's brain as she watched the outlines of the three men becoming less and less distinct.

Then she made a sudden, uncontrolled movement which called forth a sharp reprimand from the seaman in command of the lifeboat upon which she was a passenger.

To Nona's consternation she had seen the figure of a girl suddenly appear on deck. She was wearing the uniform of a Red Cross nurse and came and stood beside the ship's chaplain and the first officer.

Nona found it impossible to recognize her, yet in comparison with the two men she looked so small that at a distance one might have judged her to be a child.

Then Nona observed Captain Wells swing around and move toward the newcomer in amazed horror.

He must have given the word of command. The instant after the first officer and the chaplain and the Red Cross nurse, wearing their life belts, jumped from the deck into the sea.

Soon Captain Wells followed. He had

remained until the last. Ten seconds after the *Consolation*, with a movement of superb surrender, sank into the depths and the waves closed over her.

CHAPTER XV

Alone on the Mighty Deep.

"Oh, hear us, when we cry to Thee
For those in peril on the sea."

"JANET!" Howard Courtney had exclaimed the instant the girl's figure stood next him. He said nothing more, as there seemed nothing to be said, the full horror of the situation as he regarded it, being expressed in the tone of his voice.

Janet shook her head.

"I cannot explain now, except that I made a mistake. Yet if I must go down I am glad to feel that you will be close beside me. Promise me, Howard, if I become too troublesome, you will make no effort to save me. Remember the swims we used to have together in the old days at Atlantic City?"

There was actually no tremor in Janet Perry's voice.

The ship's chaplain put his arm about her.

"There is no one in the world like you, Janet! But I shall not lose hold of you."

At this instant the order came from Captain Wells that the others go forward and jump clear of the ship. As she was going down rapidly, he delayed only another moment, so that he might be the last.

If Janet shivered and drew back as she approached the ship's edge and saw the limitless expanse of water, she made no protest. Howard's hand was in hers. She must make the plunge no harder for him, since it was inevitable for them both. But, woman like, Janet closed her eyes.

When she opened them, they had both gone down under the water for an instant, had arisen and were swimming beside one another with straight, even strokes, as they so often had done in times past.

After the first plunge the water did not seem cold.

Not far off there was a lifeboat which they both felt able to reach without difficulty.

Yet no matter how strongly they swam in its direction, it appeared to Janet that they were making no progress.

"What is the trouble, Howard?" she asked, resting for a moment. "Why does the lifeboat not come closer to us? Won't they take us on board?"

Howard Courtnay called out for help.

Then they both saw that an argument was taking place among the men and women in the boat.

Later, one of the seamen shouted.

"Sorry, we are too many aboard now! To add two others might sink us. We will find another boat and send it to pick you up."

There was cruelty in the reply and yet it represented the rule of the sea.

"Never mind *both* of us," Howard Courtnay answered. "Surely you will save the woman with me."

But either the crew upon the boat did not hear, or else they were obdurate, since they continued pulling in the opposite direction.

"Suppose we rest, Janet, while we study

the situation?" Howard Courtney said as calmly as if he were speaking under ordinary circumstances; their strength was not to be wasted. Slipping his arm about his companion, with the aid of her life-belt, he easily supported her while they both floated, yielding to the movement of the waves, as if they were one figure rather than two.

The hospital ship had disappeared and there were no lifeboats close enough to be signaled. Pieces of wreckage were beginning to float about near them which had broken away from the *Consolation* and risen to the surface of the water.

"A lifeboat will rescue us after a little, Janet. There is no point in wearing ourselves out in attempting to reach another. We will swim about just enough to keep warm. Are you very cold?"

Bravely Janet shook her head.

"The weight of my skirt troubles me most. I should have been wise and taken it off."

In spite of her words Janet's lips were becoming blue, and there were black shadows under her eyes.

"Quick! Dive, Janet!" Howard Court-nay ordered.

Seeing that something was moving toward them, instantly the girl obeyed.

As they came up on the other side, for the first time Howard Courtnay released his hold on her hand.

"Stay as close to this spot as possible; it was stupid of me not to have thought at once," he announced, and although his speech was vague, yet Janet understood.

A hatchway grating had floated past them.

Swimming after it, the man raised himself upon one elbow and then signaled Janet, who with a few strokes joined him and climbed onto the grating.

Later, Janet was able to sit resting nearly the whole of her weight upon it, while her companion kept his shoulders and head safely out of the reach of the waves. He swam a little now and then but never with a vigor that was fatiguing. So after this comparative security they felt better able to wait until their rescue.

"Don't you feel a little like 'Treasure

Island,' or 'The Ancient Mariner,' Howard, or characters in some romantic tale of the sea which one read as a small child?" Janet demanded. "Inside of me something keeps repeating: 'Can this be really I?' Yet why, I wonder? For the past three years we have been hearing about ships being sunk and people going through the same experiences we are facing. Yet somehow I don't believe I ever thought such a fate could overtake me. I don't even feel as if what we are now passing through is exactly real."

"You are a trump, Janet," the young man replied, which, after all, was scarcely an answer.

Inside his mind certain questions were repeating themselves:

How long would Janet continue to feel as she said? How long would she only sense the dramatic values of their present situation, before cold, hunger, thirst and fatigue and the fear that is immortal in us all brought her tragedy close home to her?

"Do I look in the least like a Lorelei,

Howard?" Janet asked a few moments after her first speech. "At least my gold hair is floating about my shoulders as hers appeared in the old German lieder. Yet, somehow, although she always seemed to me a most alluring person, I do not feel at all fascinating. It is colder up here than in the water, Howard. But why don't you try to pretend to be amused by my sallies? You are far too serious minded a person!"

"I am sorry, but I cannot pretend under our present circumstances, Janet."

The young clergyman spoke with the severe manner to which, in times past, the girl had frequently been introduced.

Afterwards she remained silent with her face growing whiter and her lips bluer.

"Are you very tired, dear? We are sure to be discovered after a little. If only my coat were not too wet to be of any comfort!"

Janet looked about them.

Upon the water she could still see dark spots which might be lifeboats, yet they were not coming closer, they were drawing further away.

"Don't you think it just as foolish to pretend one thing as another, Howard? No lifeboat is coming to save us and it helps me to try to be gay in adversity. But we can never understand each other, not even at an hour like this."

"Yet I would give my life to spare you five minutes of what you are suffering, Janet."

A little later the girl leaned over and placed her cold hand lightly on the man's cheek.

"We would quarrel at the gates of heaven, or the other place, wouldn't we, Howard? Perhaps we are doing that now." Then, with a brave attempt at gaiety: "Don't you think my little craft would carry the two of us? You're getting dreadfully wet down there."

Howard managed, by slowly lifting himself up, to take a seat beside Janet, and put his arm around her.

The reaction of the long hours of strain was showing, a strain not due alone to Janet's own situation and that of her companion, but to the shock of the first signal

of danger and then to seeing the suffering of the wounded and ill soldiers being transferred to the lifeboats.

Yet if Janet's physical strength had failed, her courage had not.

The dawn had passed and daylight had come and the sun was beginning to shine warmly. Their little raft was plainly visible, yet none of the *Consolation's* lifeboats had put back to search for them.

Howard Courtnay did not believe there was a possibility that land could be near, yet his one hope was that they were not far from Newfoundland.

At the time of the sinking they had been told that the *Consolation* was within a few days of New York, although no one aboard, except the officers, knew the exact route she was taking.

There might be a chance in a hundred, if they were near Newfoundland, that a fishing boat would pick them up. However, unless one of their own lifeboats finally returned, Howard Courtnay felt they had but little chance. Without food or water Janet could not long survive.

CHAPTER XVI

Sonya, Bianca and Carlo

AFTER the transfer of the most desperately ill of the soldiers to the lifeboats Bianca was the next person considered.

She was the youngest girl on board the sinking ship; indeed, seemed a child in comparison with every one else. Moreover, she had become a great favorite with the *Consolation's* officers and the soldiers, particularly those to whom she had been able to render her gentle and thoughtful services.

Bianca showed no alarm as she climbed into her place in the lifeboat. Her manner was as serene and undisturbed as usual.

It was Louise Roberts who broke down utterly at this trying moment.

She kept calling her cousin's name in a fashion no one could understand and insisting that she dared not risk her life in so small a boat.

Finally, one of the sailors lifted her and dropped her unceremoniously into her seat. Afterwards, she continued shaking as if she were in a nervous chill. When the lifeboat was lowered into the sea she gave forth little moans and cries of terror, trying to the nerves of the persons beside her.

Carlo Navara was placed next Bianca. Their boat was commanded by Dr. David Clark.

It seemed to the young girl that Carlo continued to look unnecessarily distressed.

Leaning over, and with the somewhat elderly manner she had recently learned to assume in her dealing both with Carlo and Sonya, Bianca whispered softly:

"Don't be frightened, Carlo. There is no reason to believe Sonya is not being as well looked after as the rest of us."

Carlo shook his head, his manner revealing no lack of self-control, although his dark eyes were filled with despondency.

"I don't know why, Bianca, but from the instant our ship was torpedoed, I have been convinced that Sonya would be lost. I had this thought from the time I learned she

meant to undertake hospital ship work. I fear now that my premonition may prove true."

In the midst of their danger, Bianca managed to smile, a fleeting smile which showed in the corners of her lips, not in her wide-open dark eyes, whose expression was nearly always serious.

"I don't think you need trust your premonition this time, Carlo. When one cares a great deal for a person one is always having just such nervous fears. At this moment Sonya is probably equally worried about you.

The same idea which had occurred to Nona Davis a week or more before, when Bianca had informed her of Sonya's sudden breakdown, flitted at this second through Carlo Navara's mind. Could Bianca be wiser than any of her friends had dreamed? She was proving herself in many unexpected ways.

Even now there was comfort in her vague suggestion that Sonya, because of her affection, was thinking of him with the same longing and anxiety that he was suffering for her.

Carlo patted Bianca's shoulder kindly.

"Don't be frightened, my dear. I will look after you if there is need; you see, before we met you, Sonya and I were wrecked in the Mediterranean. I behaved like a chump and Sonya was most awfully good to me, although I was a stranger to her then. I would like to be able to care for you and to have her learn I am no longer a coward."

"You are a funny boy, Carlo, always to be considering what Sonya may think of you. Thank you for your offer. I don't think I will be much afraid."

Then Bianca relapsed into her accustomed silence, leaving Carlo to uninterrupted thought of Sonya.

As Bianca and Carlo had the good fortune to be in the lifeboat under the direction of the commanding surgeon of the *Consolation*, there was no confusion when they moved away from the torpedoed ship.

Their course lay off to the left. Yet Bianca continued to gaze toward the hospital ship until she had received the impression that every lifeboat had gotten

safely away. Not until then did she feel a sense of relief.

She had not confided the fact to her companion, not wishing to increase his nervousness, yet Bianca *had* been influenced by Carlo's presentiment of some especial misfortune befalling Sonya.

She was more at ease now and so discovered that a wounded soldier near her was finding it impossible to secure a less painful position. Leaning over, Bianca tried to help him and finally so arranged that his head could rest in her lap. Then she placed her cool slim hands upon his forehead, talking to the soldier and begging him to try to sleep, as if he were an ill child. His restlessness had been endangering the lifeboat, but in a few moments, under Bianca's care, he became quiet.

There was but one other Red Cross nurse in the lifeboat save Louise Roberts, whose thoughts were apparently still concentrated entirely upon her own danger. It was Bianca's present idea that she must do what she could to fill a Red Cross nurse's place.

There was no immediate reason for panic, as the boat contained ample provision of food and water, while the commanding surgeon was supplied with medicines to afford temporary relief to the suffering.

Passing alongside other lifeboats, the occupants called reassuringly to one another.

Further along there was a sudden change. At first no one spoke of the spectacle which almost at the same instant a number of eyes beheld.

Through mismanagement or unavoidable disaster, one of the *Consolation's* lifeboats, which had been among the first to get away, had overturned.

"Close your eyes, Bianca," Carlo ordered sternly. He at once had seen what he hoped Bianca had not. When the boat had overturned, the men and women had been pinned underneath and were drowned.

Nevertheless, Bianca had seen, and although her face grew rigid as marble and almost as white, she continued to look with undaunted eyes.

Then her eyes turned toward the com-

manding surgeon with an instinctive appeal. Yet Bianca seemed thoroughly to grasp the necessity for obedience and discipline in times of stress which many women fail to understand. Now she made no request, recognizing its futility, except by her voiceless look.

The commanding surgeon had not observed the look, as he was ordering his oarsmen to pull close to the overturned lifeboat so they might be convinced that no one remained alive.

Perhaps it was strange, nevertheless it was Dr. David Clark who first recognized Sonya Valesky in the figure of the woman floating upon the water and keeping herself afloat, with one hand grasping the overturned lifeboat.

Yet the instant after Dr. Clark's recognition, her hand released its hold and she went down.

Carlo and Bianca had not recognized Sonya.

Before the body, which had disappeared, had risen, Carlo, with the artist's natural shrinking from the ugly sights of life,

placed one hand across Bianca's eyes and the other over his own.

The next moment Bianca pushed away the shielding hand.

"Please don't, Carlo. We are trying to save one of our Red Cross nurses, so whoever she is she must be one of our friends."

The body, which had now come up to the top of the water, was floating toward them.

As the sailor who had volunteered jumped overboard and the boat lurched with his dive into the sea, Bianca saw and knew. Even then she did not cry out or confide her tragic information. Carlo must learn soon enough.

When the seamen had lifted the apparently lifeless body into their boat and afterwards assisted their companion back into his place, Dr. Clark changed his position. As he knelt to discover if Sonya were still living, by accident his body formed a wall shutting out both Bianca's and Carlo's view.

Moreover, as Carlo had no wish to see and as he could be of no aid, he continued to keep his eyes covered.

Yet in the moments of uncertainty which followed, Bianca was aware that a test was being applied to determine whether Sonya were alive, or whether her body must be returned to the sea. Still Bianca made no movement or sound.

There may be persons who will believe, as Nona Davis had in the past, that Bianca's self-control was due to a lack of feeling, yet there may have been a finer cause back of it.

After a few moments the commanding surgeon raised his head, which had been placed over Sonya's heart.

Then he nodded curtly, giving an order, and Bianca could plainly hear his words, as their boat was at rest.

She began to cry softly.

Acutely ashamed of his own cowardice, Carlo put his arm about the young girl, yet still preferring to keep his gaze turned from the figure which had just been rescued from the sea.

CHAPTER XVII

The Rescue

“**Y**OU appreciate that with one extra person on board, we must all make sacrifices,” the commanding surgeon announced. He had done all that was necessary and Sonya was reviving slowly. The Red Cross nurse, who was in the opposite end of the boat from Bianca and Carlo, now held Sonya’s head in her lap. There was nothing except to wait while she recovered consciousness.

Not yet knowing for whom he was offering to endure the self-denial, Carlo Navara spoke quickly.

“I am glad to give half of whatever food and water is considered my portion.”

“Not much, old man,” one of the wounded soldiers expostulated. “You know you are not traveling with a crowd of *that* kind. The men on this boat will all share alike. It is not often we soldiers have a

chance to do a favor for one of our Red Cross nurses; when we have, we count it luck."

"But I am perfectly well and you fellows are not," Carlo protested.

The commanding surgeon spoke with authority.

"I think we can arrange so that no one is sacrificed unduly."

During this conversation Bianca was sitting staring ahead with a frown on her face, scarcely hearing the words that were being spoken. From the moment she had realized that Sonya would live, she had been making up her mind that she must tell Carlo at once that it was Sonya whom they had saved. It was incredible that he had not already found out. Now he must discover at any moment and Bianca feared that with his impetuous, uncontrolled temperament he might precipitate some kind of an emotional scene which would be trying for them all and particularly for Sonya.

It was Carlo himself who unconsciously solved the difficulty.

"Who is it we have rescued, Bianca?" he whispered. "It is weak of me not to

have been willing to look at the body before I was sure there was life in it. Yet if I could have helped I would not have been a coward. I wonder if one should face cruel sights when no good can come of it? Which of our nurses have we rescued?"

"It can't be possible you don't yet know, Carlo, with only a few feet separating you," Bianca argued to gain time. "When I tell you, promise me you will make no movement and will not cry out. Dr. Clark has warned us that no one of us must dare make a sudden move, else with our lifeboat so crowded there is danger of overturning it. You must think first of Sonya."

"Sonya?" Carlo repeated a little stupidly.

Then something in Bianca's expression, not in her words, awakened his slow knowledge.

To his credit, but perhaps more to Bianca's, he made no sound.

Slowly lifting himself out of his place, he gazed at Sonya to assure himself of her safety. At this instant she opened her eyes.

Her straightforward, unafraid gaze quieted his anxiety.

A little later Sonya was sitting up talking to the other passengers near her, as if she had endured no greater disaster than they had encountered. She thanked them for her rescue, but did not speak of her experience further, realizing it was not wise to bring too close a common danger which they were still facing.

Having seen Bianca and Carlo, with an expression of relief at finding them both safe, Sonya had smiled and waved to them both, but had made no effort to talk to them, separated as they were by half the length of the boat.

"If only I had known it was Sonya and could have done something to help," Carlo murmured, again choosing Bianca as his confidant.

Bianca was growing weary. The confinement of sitting still and trying never to stir in order not to disturb the soldier whose head was resting in her lap, had given her a sensation of numbness and little cramping pains in her back and legs.

"Please don't be so tiresome and think always of yourself, Carlo. I do wish you

would try not to allow yourself to become spoiled, even though you are so gifted. What does it matter, so Sonya was saved, whether or not you helped to rescue her? Sometimes I wonder if it is Sonya you really love, or merely your determination not to be thwarted and to compel her to return your love," Bianca whispered.

Afterwards she was sorry, because Carlo immediately behaved like a sulky boy.

However, he had the artist's temperament and did not long remain depressed.

"You are unkind, Bee," he returned five minutes after, using a diminutive title Sonya sometimes accorded the younger girl. "Still, I suppose I forgive you under the circumstances. Suppose we try to see which one of us will first discover the ship that is coming to rescue us?"

Carlo had observed Bianca's fatigue and wished if possible to distract her. He and Bianca had a curious relation; sometimes they were friends, again they were as quarrelsome as if they had been an ill-assorted brother and sister. Always Carlo was a little jealous of the amount of time

and affection which Sonya bestowed upon the young girl under her protection. If Bianca was also jealous of Carlo for the same reason she did not reveal the fact.

About noon on the same day a destroyer, scouting in front of a United States transport, which was returning home for a fresh consignment of troops, sighted a lifeboat.

She had received the S O S message from the *Consolation* and had been cruising about in order to offer help.

Mildred Thornton was a passenger upon the first of the lifeboats to be discovered. A little later the destroyer ran across the boat in charge of the commanding surgeon, who was able to report the complete destruction of the first United States hospital ship.

When Sonya and Bianca came aboard the destroyer, Mildred at once devoted herself to their care; having been rescued after only a few hours in the lifeboat, she had suffered no especial strain.

Bianca was found to be in a far more exhausted condition than any one had realized; like many persons who are able

to retain their calmness at a moment of danger, she felt the greater exhaustion, once the tension was removed.

As she and Sonya were given a small stateroom belonging to one of the ship's officers, under Dr. Clark's direction, they immediately went to bed.

There were no passengers on the destroyer, yet the crew were in sufficient number to bestow every attention upon the wounded soldiers they had been fortunate enough to save.

Later in the day the destroyer picked up three other lifeboats belonging to the *Consolation*. She also sent out a second wireless message to other ships in the neighborhood with a report of the tragedy and asking their aid.

Toward evening on the same day Sonya came out on deck, having left Bianca sleeping as if she never intended to awaken.

After stopping to speak to a young officer who congratulated her upon her rescue and asked if there was anything he could do for her comfort, Sonya saw Dr. David Clark standing talking to Dr. Latham and Miss Blackstone.

She had not known of their rescue, since it had occurred after her withdrawal to an inside stateroom.

Sonya went toward them immediately to express her pleasure at their deliverance.

More plainly than ever before in her presence Dr. Latham now betrayed his attachment to Nona Davis. He would talk of no one else; indeed, he continued to insist that Sonya give him some information with regard to Nona's fate, in spite of the fact that she assured him this was manifestly impossible.

Sonya was equally unhappy. Yet unless their destroyer discovered the lifeboat in which Nona had taken refuge, no word could be had of her until their own landing.

Thirty-six hours later, having picked up two other lifeboats, and received word of the rescue of several others, by ships in the vicinity, the destroyer was speeding toward home, trying to catch up with the convoy of which she had been a member.

In spite of their anxiety and their bitter resentment against the German government for this latest outrage, the rescued soldiers

and the doctors and nurses from the *Consolation*, actually enjoyed the remainder of their trip "back home."

They had hours of pleasure. In these days of tragedy human beings are acquiring the art of being cheerful under conditions which would have meant only a pervading gloom in a happier time.

Perhaps a big part of doing "one's bit" is this present American will to cheerfulness, one of the lessons of this war that the Allies are teaching us.

Sonya and Dr. Clark used to sit together in the late afternoons before dinner time talking of many things. Somehow it seemed to Sonya, now that Dr. Clark was no longer in command of the work in which she was an humble assistant, that their relation had in a measure changed. She could now approach him more in the fashion to which she was accustomed.

They both had spent full and interesting lives and found themselves confiding a number of their experiences.

Dr. Clark struck Sonya as a man of singular modesty and devotion to his pro-

fession. But he also impressed her as too grave a man with too few pleasures outside his work.

At present, if Miss Blackstone frowned upon their friendship, Sonya felt less concern. Their professional relation had ended and until reaching New York they were merely passengers aboard the United States destroyer.

The Red Cross nurses who had been rescued continued to care for the wounded, but there was no possibility of organization under the present conditions which would endure so short a time. Moreover, the wounded men seemed to grow better with each hour they drew nearer home.

In reality the person who suffered most because of Sonya's and Dr. David Clark's growing friendship was Carlo.

Carlo was extremely annoyed, and because Sonya would only laugh at him or else scold if he became too reproachful, he confided most of his grievances to Bianca.

Bianca came out on deck one evening just at sundown the day before their ship was due in New York harbor.

She looked extremely picturesque in a dress which had been loaned her by a Red Cross worker who was returning home on a vacation after two years of serving in the canteens in France.

The dress was of some white woolen material, a good deal too long for Bianca and made for a woman a number of years older. Yet it gave her the quaint old-fashioned appearance she had been losing in a measure since making her home in the United States and wearing more conventional New York clothes.

Observing that Dr. Clark and Sonya were sitting by each other in the forward part of the deck, Bianca deliberately pretended that she wished to find some one at the other end, although originally having intended to join the older woman.

By accident she discovered Carlo alone in a steamer chair, gazing gloomily out over the water. Bianca conquered her inclination to smile.

She realized, though no one else did, that Carlo was feeling as if fate were dealing unfairly with him. Gladly he had given

up the thought of his great musical career, when he believed he could add to the pleasure of the wounded and also be at not too great a distance from Sonya.

During the period he was succeeding in this effort and the wounded soldiers were demanding his time and talents, Carlo had not a shadow of regret for his postponed ambitions. The regret was not deep now. Yet as he was no longer particularly useful or necessary to anyone's comfort or happiness, he began to see the mountain of achievement upon which he had turned his back.

The soldiers did not care to hear him sing, not in these last hours before their home coming. They preferred to talk, speculating upon how soon they would be well enough to be transferred from the New York hospitals to their own homes.

In the evenings, after dinner, the officers aboard the destroyer urged Carlo to sing. After complying with the request on one occasion, he steadfastly refused to sing again. Except for his soldiers, he was not fond of singing in public, save in concert or opera houses.

Moreover, it was Carlo's present conviction that Sonya had become entirely indifferent to his presence, not only on board ship, but on the face of the earth.

At the moment of Bianca's discovery of him he had just reached a conclusion which he felt anxious to impart to an interested audience.

"Won't you walk with me, Carlo?" Bianca entreated. She looked sufficiently pretty to have engaged his attention and to have banished the thought of any one else. She wore a little blue cap which one of the ship's officers had presented her, and her dark eyes were always an interesting contrast with her fair skin and hair.

Carlo got up but without an appearance of pleasure at the invitation.

The evening was lovely, late June at sea, yet with the fragrances in the air of the nearby land.

Deliberately Carlo led Bianca to the opposite side of the ship, so as not to come near Sonya and her companion.

If he was under the impression that Bianca was not aware of his reason for

this action, he was mistaken, although she made no comment, only swung round and walked back when they came to the turn in the deck which would have brought them to the other side.

“Do you intend to continue your hospital ship work, Bianca, when your first effort has turned out such a fiasco?” Carlo inquired.

Bianca stared at him, a little surprised at this unforeseen question, which seemed to bear no relation to the subject upon which she knew he was thinking.

“Why of course, Carlo. One scarcely begins war work with the thought of turning back as soon as there is trouble. I think we have been very fortunate in one sense to have been rescued, although of course until we know what has become of the other people on the *Consolation*, one hardly likes to speak of oneself. My only difficulty in continuing my work will be Sonya. She was greatly opposed to my undertaking it at all and was seriously angry with me for having gone ahead without asking her permission. Now after our

accident she may refuse to allow me to continue and of course I can't, unless she gives at least a halfway consent."

"Do you really believe Sonya cares particularly what becomes of you, Bianca Zoli?" Carlo inquired gloomily. "You know what an adventurous life she has led, how many friends have come in contact with her and then disappeared. I consider Sonya interested only in new people."

Bianca laughed.

"You think no such thing, Carlo. Sonya is the most faithful of friends. She has rather a difficult time with so many persons jealous of her. Nona Davis has disliked me until recently, partly because she resented Sonya's kindness to me, although I know she had other reasons. You are absurd, you know, Carlo, about Dr. Clark. He and Sonya are nearly the same age and it is natural they should enjoy each other. For your own sake, please don't make Sonya seriously angry."

"You know you are a rather unusual person, Bianca Zoli," Carlo answered unex-

pectedly, "and I am just beginning to find it out. I believe I used to think you were a pretty doll, a little cold and selfish. Perhaps Latin blood makes one less transparent than Anglo-Saxon. But how absurd of me to talk to a little girl like you in such a grown-up fashion!"

Bianca's cheeks were flushed with pleasure, since even a half compliment from Carlo was better than none.

"Come with me now, Carlo, I wish to ask Sonya a question. It makes you ridiculous to seem to skulk about the boat as if you were the villain in a romantic opera. Dr. Clark and Sonya will be glad to have us join them."

If this last remark did not embody an absolute conviction on Bianca's part, at least it had a stimulating effect upon her companion.

And certainly Sonya and Dr. Clark were cordial in their attitude to the newcomers.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Home Coming

ABOUT thirty-six hours after the arrival of Sonya and Bianca at their apartment on Riverside Drive, a taxicab drew up in front of the door of the apartment house.

The girl who jumped out of the cab, refusing to give her name or be announced over the telephone, insisted upon being taken immediately to Miss Valesky's apartment.

There was something in her appearance which made the elevator man comply with her request.

It was late in the evening, near an early bed-time, yet Sonya and Bianca were both sitting up, pretending to read. Every now and then they glanced toward the telephone as if expecting it to ring.

Both the woman and girl showed the effects of their recent experience, although tonight their faces were more anxious than weary.

"It is strange no word of any kind has been received concerning the fate of the other lifeboats," Sonya remarked, throwing down the last edition of the afternoon paper through which for the past hour she had been searching for the information she desired. "I wish you would go to bed, Bianca. There is no reason for *you* to sit up. Dr. Clark has promised me that he will telephone the last news he is able to obtain tonight. Possibly he may call in to give me the information himself, if it is not too late."

"Have you forgotten, Sonya, that Carlo told us he would come in for a few moments after his concert tonight? He also was to make an effort to learn if there had been any later report at the newspaper offices for the morning edition of the papers. If Dr. Clark is to be here I think perhaps I had better remain up."

"To chaperon me or in order to see Carlo, Bianca?" Sonya questioned a little teasingly. "Foolish Carlo, to have sung so soon after his landing! He is not taking proper care of his voice. I hope when his

maestro has had a talk with him Carlo will behave more sensibly. I think he was more affected by our disaster than you and I were, Bianca. In fact, he looks more used up than either of us."

"I do wish to stay up to see, Carlo," Bianca answered; "I am sorry for him. As for his singing tonight, Sonya, you know he was to appear at a Red Cross benefit and for that reason was not willing to refuse."

Sonya smiled. She was wearing a lovely dress of gray and rose chiffon, a dress she had owned several years, and yet one that was always lovely because of its delicate texture and the combination of colors.

"I was not intending seriously to criticize Carlo, Bianca, so you need not appear upon the defensive. It was wonderfully good of him to sing tonight, I was simply afraid he was not equal to it, as he has not seemed well since our landing. As for being sorry for him, as you know, Bianca dear, I think it hardly necessary for you to be especially sympathetic with Carlo. I know of no one to whom the future would seem to offer more than it does to Carlo Navara. He

may be forgetting us, you know, my dear."

"He will not forget *you*, Sonya, and one can be sorry for people, no matter how brilliant their lives may appear," Bianca replied, in the gentle, unmoved manner she so often used.

The older woman shrugged her shoulders, having long since discovered how wellnigh impossible it was ever to move Bianca from a point of view, in spite of her childlike and yielding manner.

Then Sonya frowned. "Suppose we do not argue these matters tonight, Bianca. I am really so anxious to learn of Nona's safety, that whatever I may be discussing, I am really thinking of nothing else. Then poor Janet Perry, there has been absolutely no information of what has befallen her! Will Louise Roberts come back here for the night? She seemed to feel she ought to spend the evening with Janet's parents, if she could possibly be any comfort to them in their anxiety. Louise is in a curious state of mind; her nerves seem absolutely gone to pieces. She talks

as if she were responsible for Janet. I can't understand why she has such an idea. Janet must voluntarily have chosen the hospital ship work."

"Yes" Bianca answered thoughtfully, "but do you suppose it could be possible that at the end, I mean just before the sinking of the *Consolation*, Miss Roberts could have asked a sacrifice of her cousin? She might have delayed her leaving the ship. I have no reason for this suggestion; it is just an impression which came to me," Bianca explained. "From the first Miss Roberts was more frightened and unhappy than any one else I observed in a lifeboat."

At this moment, as there was a ring at the front door, both the woman and girl walked quickly across the drawing-room. It was Sonya, however, who opened the door.

"It is I, Nona Davis, Sonya; please don't be frightened, I am not a ghost. Perhaps I should have telegraphed, but I thought it wiser to come directly to you. We landed in Baltimore this afternoon and took the first train for New York. I drove

first with Captain Martin to a hotel and he promised me he would send for a friend to take care of him until he could make other arrangements. It is so hard for him and yet he has borne these last few days far better than I have."

Sonya put her arm around the girl.

"Yes, dear, it is all tragic, but not so much so to me now that I know you are safe. You look wretchedly worn out; you must let me put you to bed at once. Bianca and I have had a room waiting for you while we have prayed for your safe return. Suppose we do not try to talk a great deal tonight."

Sonya drew the younger woman into a lovely bedroom with deep blue and white draperies, which was always known in Sonya's small household as Nona's room.

When Bianca went away to get food for the newcomer, Nona suddenly put her arms about her friend.

"Oh, Sonya, it is good to be at home with you again. I wonder if I will find courage to begin my work again. But you must let Bianca leave us together. There is

something I must tell you and about which I must have your opinion at once. How many people have been rescued from the *Consolation*? We were at sea twenty-four hours before help came."

As quietly as possible, realizing that Nona must not be excited any more if it could be avoided, Sonya gave her such information as she had received concerning the fate of the survivors of the *Consolation*. At present, save for one lifeboat, everybody had been saved, now that the lifeboat of which Nona was a member had been accounted for. However, no news had been received of Captain Wells, or his first officer, or of the ship's chaplain, or Janet Perry.

Sonya insisted there was still every hope they were among the rescued.

After Nona had finished the milk which her friends insisted upon her drinking, she sat propped up in bed declaring it was impossible she could sleep in her present state of mind. She agreed to see Dr. Clark later if she could be allowed to talk to Sonya alone first.

So Bianca returned to the drawing-room to await the two guests.

"What is it you are so anxious to tell me that you persist in speaking of it at once, Nona?" the older woman demanded anxiously. "Perhaps it is best that you unburden yourself."

"I can't tell you in detail, Sonya; there is not time. It is only that since meeting Captain Martin aboard the *Consolation* I have made up my mind I cared for him. In the hours we believed we would never be saved I cannot tell you what his strength and courage were and how much he helped every human being in our lifeboat. After we were taken aboard a sailing schooner I told him I wished to be his wife. Yes, I realize it was an extraordinary thing for me to have done, Sonya, but he used to care for me and I think in a way he cares still. At least he cares enough not to be unhappy in allowing me to look after him. He is blind and must have some one near upon whom he can always depend. Yet he absolutely refuses to consider my suggestion, Sonya, and says I am not even

to see him again. In fact, he means to leave New York at once and to remain away until he is convinced I am no longer here. He insists he will not write me or have any one else write me concerning him, until I absolutely dismiss any such idea from my mind as I proposed to him. He even declares that my desire is mere sentimentality gone mad and that I would never have considered him except for his loss. But it is not that, Sonya, and you must promise me you will go with me in the morning early to see him, before he has time to leave town. If Jack Martin goes, he will keep his word and I shall not be able to find him again."

"But, Nona, my dear, don't be angry, yet perhaps Captain Martin is right. You cannot be sure your feeling for him is not pity." Sonya spoke slowly and chose her words carefully so as not to offend the younger woman. "Let us speak of this tomorrow. At least I promise you to telephone Captain Martin in the morning and ask him not to go away until one or the other of us has had a talk with him. You

realize that this is too grave a question for you to decide in a time of such emotional excitement, when you are scarcely yourself. You cannot realize what the sacrifice of your life would mean."

"But I do not regard marrying Captain Martin as a sacrifice of my life, Sonya, now that I have learned to know and to care for him," Nona returned, answering more quietly than she had yet spoken. "Yet you are both right in that I chose the wrong time for speaking. Perhaps I could have made Captain Martin believe and trust me more at some later time. At least I shall try."

There was a light noise at this instant at the door and Bianca had come to announce the arrival of Dr. David Clark.

He spent ten minutes with Nona, and soon after, when he and Sonya had left her alone, she had her first long sleep in many nights.

CHAPTER XIX

Life Currents

A WEEK later Sonya entered her drawing room, after a morning downtown devoted to business errands, to find a box of flowers and a note awaiting her.

Recognizing the handwriting on the envelope as Carlo's, she appeared a little anxious and uncomfortable before opening it.

But Sonya's expression changed as she read, first to surprise, then to regret and finally to a slight look of relief.

Carlo had written to say that, as there was no immediate work for him to do aboard another hospital ship, he had decided to go upon a midsummer concert tour and would devote a part of the proceeds to the Red Cross fund. He was sorry not to have the opportunity to say farewell rather than write it, but had decided to leave town a few days sooner than he had originally expected.

In spite of her unconscious expression of relief, Sonya Valesky sighed as she put down her note and began opening her flowers.

She would miss Carlo Navara out of her life. More deeply than he would ever realize, she cared for him. Notwithstanding, his idea of a marriage between them was out of the question. There was a new reason which Carlo may have guessed which made it best for them to be apart for a time. He had saved her from telling him by his failure to say good-by. Otherwise it was unlike him to have gone away in this abrupt fashion.

Inside the box Sonya's flowers proved to be summer roses, pink and white, sweet peas of lavender and rose, and a mass of garden forget-me-nots.

As she lifted them from the box, Sonya held the bunch close to her face for a moment. What an exquisite boy, Carlo! He had every beauty and grace of the artist's nature, and also some of the weaknesses.

Then she started a little guiltily. Bianca had entered the room in her usual quiet fashion.

Sonya noticed that Bianca's face showed rare emotion. The lids of her dark eyes were slightly reddened.

"You know Carlo has just left on his deferred concert tour, Bianca?" Sonya asked. "I am sorry to have him go without seeing him since that moment we had together the other evening after Nona's arrival. But the summer tour is the wise thing for him."

"Yes, I told him it was better for him to go away," Bianca returned.

Sonya stared a little. By this time she should have grown accustomed to the surprises Bianca afforded her; nevertheless she had not entirely.

"Then you have seen Carlo recently?" she inquired.

"Yes, he and I had a long walk in the park together the other afternoon when you were motoring with Dr. Clark. I might as well tell you, Sonya, Carlo asked me if I thought there was any possibility of your caring for Dr. Clark seriously and I told him, yes. I did not think this when we were on board ship, but I have come to

this conclusion since our return. I advised Carlo that it might be best for him to go away."

"You advised Carlo?" Sonya queried, torn between amazement and anger. "Then you have discussed me with Carlo!"

Bianca nodded gravely.

"I thought it best for Carlo to have some one to whom he could talk frankly. He is not like me and it is his nature to wish to speak freely of the things he feels deeply and you no longer allowed him to confide in you. I hope you are not angry, Sonya. Was I wrong about you and Dr. Clark? I told Carlo if I had made a mistake I would ask you to write him at once."

Bianca had come over to the table and stood looking down at the flowers. Sonya noticed that she had a small red rose, somewhat faded, thrust into her belt.

The older woman hesitated and colored.

"Bianca, you are a little white witch! After all these years I thought I had learned to hide my emotions and to keep my own secrets. I cannot write Carlo that Dr. Clark and I are not interested in each other

because it would not be true. But I will write him of course."

Sonya slipped her arm about the younger girl.

"Don't be unhappy for Carlo, Bianca. If I had been foolish enough to make the mistake of allowing a romance to develop between us, when I am so very many years older, then you would have had a reason for regret. Please don't speak of what I have just told you. I wish to confide in Nona Davis, but otherwise Dr. Clark and I desire to keep our secret. I do not wish to give up my Red Cross nursing or to interfere with Dr. Clark's war work."

Bianca kissed the older woman affectionately.

"I am so glad for you, Sonya. You have not told me much about your life and yet I know it has been difficult. In the future I hope you may be very happy. Please understand too that I think you are right about Carlo. Do not think it is altogether my sympathy for him which has made me unhappy. I shall miss seeing Carlo. You remember, Sonya, that I grew up with my

two Italian foster brothers and I think I understand men better than I do women or girls."

Sonya laughed. "There are moments when I think you understand everything and everybody, Bianca *mia*, that you are wise with the wisdom of all the great Italian ladies of the past. I trust you and Carlo may always be good friends. In many ways he is really years younger than you, and if you are sincere you can be a great help to him. Are Nona and Louise at home for lunch?"

"No, Nona left word not to expect her until just before dinner time. Louise Roberts received a letter from Janet Perry urging her to come to Philadelphia immediately. She says she has recovered sufficiently to be married right away, but that as usual the Rev. Mr. Courtney is unwilling to do what she wishes. However, Janet thinks with Louise's aid she will manage to have her own way, although her parents also desire her to wait a little longer."

Sonya laughed.

"I have an idea Janet will win. She

strikes me as one of the persons who will always succeed in doing as she likes, because no one will ever be able to count on the method she will employ. Louise told me Janet had written her that, far from being angry with her, she was extraordinarily grateful to Louise for asking her to go back to their state-room at the last moment and so lose her place in the boat. Janet insists that if this had not taken place she and Howard Courtnay would never have discovered how much they always had cared for each other. Janet was sweet enough to write Louise this information as soon as she and the *Consolation's* chaplain were rescued and taken to Halifax. But Louise is not convinced. Naturally she is ashamed of her cowardice and thoughtlessness. I am not blaming her; I entirely sympathize with her, for no one of us can know how completely our nerve may give way in a critical moment. Janet was almost equally at fault to have gone to find Louise's swimming-jacket, when Louise was already provided with a life-belt like the rest of us. But do come, let us have

lunch, Bianca. I hope to have a quiet afternoon. I have some letters to write to Washington with regard to sailing on the next hospital ship that will accept my services. You were good, Bianca, to promise me to return to school for another year next fall. It seems to me a girl who must make her own way in the world requires more education than a boy. You will marry some day, of course. Don't wait until you have become an old maid as I have, Bianca, before you have sufficient courage."

In return Bianca answered with unexpected gravity.

"No, Sonya, I shall never marry; please understand, although I never speak of it, my mother's betrayal of Italy makes marriage seem impossible for me. Only the other afternoon I told Carlo how I felt and in spite of his insisting I was absurd, he really agreed with me. But he promised to be my friend always, since I could count only upon friendship."

"Unhappy, happy Bianca," the older woman murmured, as they entered the

dining-room arm in arm. "To be so old and at the same time so young! Perhaps it is just as well our fates are hidden from us, else we should lose the excitement of the life adventure."

Later in the evening, Sonya and Nona Davis were in the same little drawing-room alone. Only a few moments before Sonya had related the story of her engagement to Dr. David Clark, explaining that she and Dr. Clark had allowed their romance to develop quickly, as they were no longer young and therefore had little time to waste. Not expecting to be married for a number of months, only Sonya's intimate friends were to share their secret for the present.

Unselfishly Nona Davis was delighted, as Dr. Clark and Sonya seemed in every way suited to each other, while Sonya needed the anchor and the protection of a permanent affection.

A little time they talked of the old days in England at the beginning of the war and of Sonya's unfortunate girlhood engagement to the British colonel she had met again

during the first thrilling months. Later he had been reported "killed in action."

Sonya had only admiration for his memory and regret for their old differences of opinion, when the fault had been so largely hers.

"Did you see Captain Martin today, Nona?" Sonya inquired, feeling they had talked long enough of her affairs.

Nona nodded.

"For five minutes, yes. I was not allowed to remain longer, as several officers, old friends, were coming to call, and Jack considered it would not be compatible with my dignity to be discovered making him a call, although Mildred Thornton was good enough to go with me to act as my most unnecessary chaperon. But in the five minutes, Sonya, I was given two ultimatums. First Captain Martin would not consider my proposal of marriage to him unless his sight were completely restored. As we have so little faith in that miracle, I refused to agree. Then the nearest thing Jack offered was, that if I waited, one, two, three years, I am really not sure

of the number of years, and still continued of the same mind, and had found no one else, and a great many things I can't recall at present, why then he might condescend to think of accepting me. But he was not even sure of that."

"Well, Nona," her friend questioned, "what do you intend doing?"

Nona was sitting with her hands folded in her lap, looking neither restless nor dissatisfied.

"I shall wait, Sonya, until there is no disputing the strength of my affection. I confess at other times I have had small romances and have believed for a little while in their reality. Now all my uncertainties have passed away and I have a curious sense of peace. The war has taught me to have faith in the great winning qualities, patience and steadfastness. I told Jack today I shall conquer his prejudice and unfaith until the final victory is mine."

Sonya was silent a moment.

"What will you do in the meantime, Nona, if Captain Martin still refuses to have you devote your time to him?"

"Why, go on with my Red Cross nursing, Sonya, until the war is over, and afterwards if I am still needed. After a little rest here with you, I shall do whatever I am ordered, whether it is to nurse on a second hospital ship, or in a foreign country, or at home."

Then Nona got up suddenly from her chair.

"I had a letter today from a former friend of mine in France—Philip Dawson, a newspaper correspondent. He wished to explain why he had not written me before. He had been ill in a hospital in this country and afterwards heard I had changed my work and was no longer in France. It is no matter now. I shall write and say I am sorry he had a bad time of it, although, as he has returned to his newspaper correspondence in France and is well again, my letter may seem a bit unnecessary. The best news in his letter was the brilliant story of the French and American drive near Château Thierry. Of course one has read of it in the papers, but it was interesting to have the account first-hand. How wonderful it is to feel our victory is at last

on the way! No matter how long the time before it is complete, the time cannot seem so long as these past four years. I think always, Sonya, my memory of this war will remain the image of a Red Cross."

Then the two friends parted for the night.

Finis

